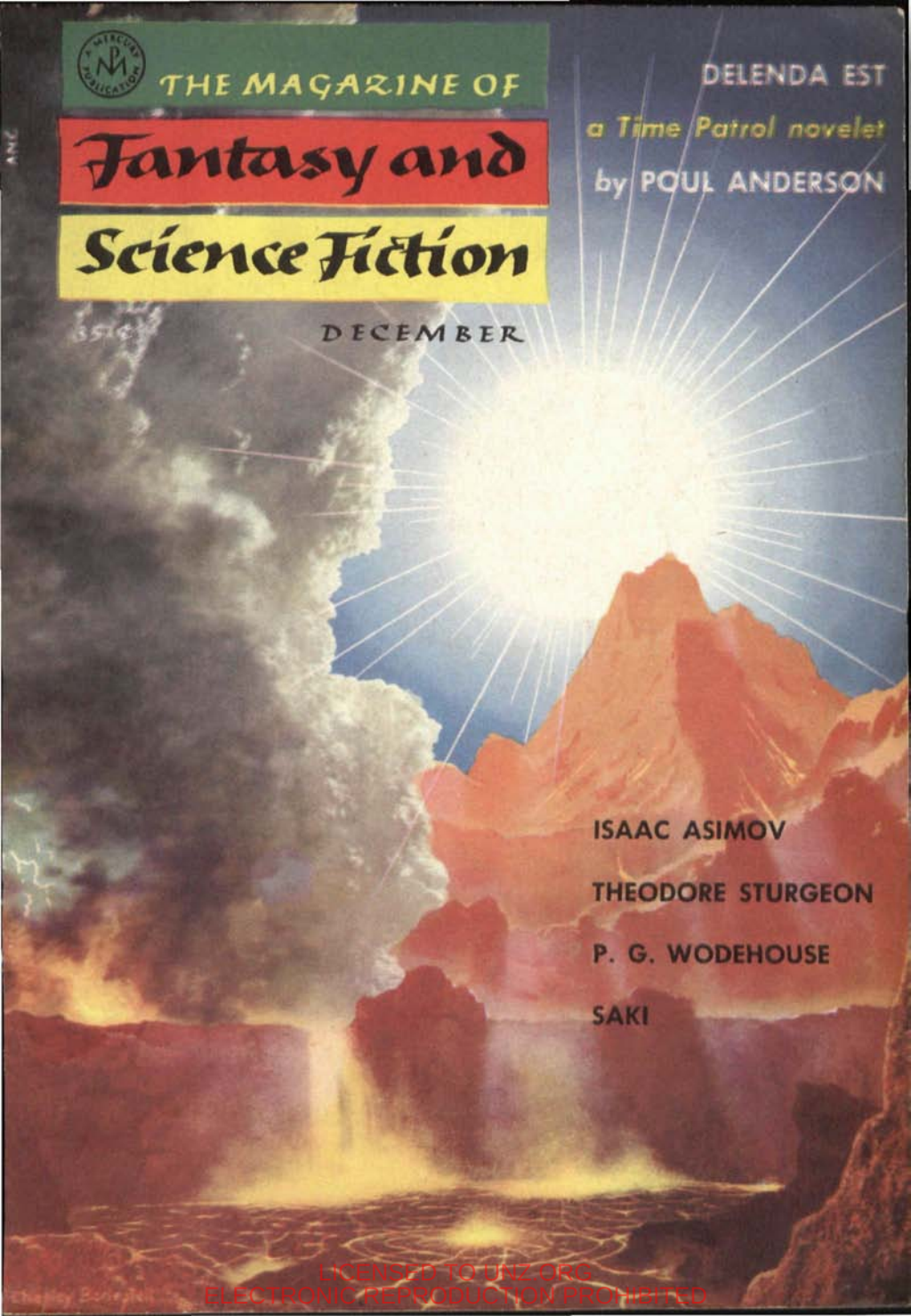

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Science Fiction Marches On . . .

The rising popularity of science fiction among the cultural leaders of the nation, as well as among the people at large, is ample testimony of its vitality and maturity. Engineers, physicians, chemists, statesmen, educators – they have all found pleasure and enlightenment in science fiction.

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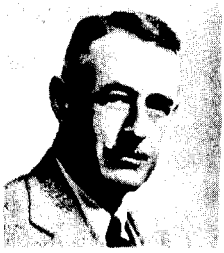
And J. Donald Adams, former editor of the *New York Times Book Review,* author and editor of its celebrated page 2, "Speaking of Books," has given science fiction the accolade of the highest standards of literary criticism. He says:



"I am . . . convinced that science fiction, in spite of the vast amount of silly and clumsy writing the genre has spawned, is deserving of the serious attention it is only now beginning to receive. . . . It is at once a literature of escape and one deeply and earnestly concerned with mankind's present plight and its problematical future."

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 9, No. 6 DECEMBER

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COVER PAINTING BY CHESLEY BONESTELL
(*sun becoming a nova*)

Joseph W. Ferman, PUBLISHER *Anthony Boucher*, EDITOR

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This is another chronokinetic mission for Manse Everard, whose first assignment you read in Time Patrol *(F&SF, May, 1955). You'll find here a fascinating puzzle (can you deduce the historical turning point which created this World of If?), a love story, some entertaining speculation in geography and linguistics — and, above all, the fast-moving sweep of romantic adventure.*

Delenda Est

by POUL ANDERSON

THE HUNTING IS GOOD IN EUROPE 40,000 years ago, and the winter sports are unexcelled anywhen. So the Time Patrol, always solicitous for its highly trained personnel, maintains a lodge in the Pleistocene Pyrenees.

Agent Unattached Manse Everard (American, mid-Twentieth A.D.) stood on the glassed-in veranda and looked across ice-blue distances, toward the northern slopes where the mountains fell off into woodland, marsh and tundra. He was a big man, fairly young, with heavy homely features that had once encountered a German rifle butt and never quite straightened out again, gray eyes, and a brown crew cut. He wore loose green trousers and tunic of Twenty-Third-Century insulsynth, boots handmade by a Nineteenth-Century French-Canadian, and smoked a foul old briar of indeterminate origin. There was a vague restlessness about him, and he ignored the noise from within, where half a dozen agents were drinking and talking and playing the piano.

A Cro-Magnon guide went by across the snow-covered yard, a tall handsome fellow dressed rather like an Eskimo (why had romance never credited paleolithic man with enough sense to wear jacket, pants, and footgear in a glacial period?), his face painted, one of the steel knives which had hired him at his belt. The Patrol could act quite freely, this far back in time; there was no danger of upsetting the past, for the metal would rust away and the strangers be forgotten in a few centuries. The main nuisance was that female agents from the more libertine periods were always having affairs with the native hunters.

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Piet van Sarawak (Dutch-Indonesian-Venusian, early Twenty-Fourth A.D.), a slim dark young man with good looks and a smooth technique that gave the guides some stiff competition, joined Everard, and they stood for a moment in companionable silence. He was also Unattached, on call to help out in any milieu, and had worked with the American before. They had taken their vacation together.

He spoke first, in Temporal, the synthetic language of the Patrol. "I hear they've spotted a few mammoth near Toulouse." The city would not be built for a long time, but habit was powerful.

"I've got one," said Everard impatiently. "I've also been skiing and mountain climbing and watched the native dances."

Van Sarawak nodded, took out a cigaret, and puffed it into lighting. The bones stood out in his lean brown face as he sucked in the smoke. "A pleasant interlude," he agreed, "but after a time the outdoor life begins to pall."

There were still two weeks of their furlough left. In theory, since he could return almost to the moment of departure, an agent could take indefinite vacations; but actually he was supposed to devote a certain percentage of his probable lifetime to the job. (They never told you when you were scheduled to die — it wouldn't have been certain anyhow, time being mutable. One perquisite of an agent's office was the longevity treatment of the Daneelians, ca. one million A.D., the supermen who were the shadowy chiefs of the Patrol.)

"What I would enjoy," continued van Sarawak, "is some bright lights, music, girls who've never heard of time travel —"

"Done!" said Everard.

"Augustan Rome?" asked the other eagerly. "I've never been there. I could get a hypno on language and customs here."

Everard shook his head. "It's overrated. Unless we want to go 'way upstairs, the most glorious decadence available is right in my own milieu, say New York. If you know the right phone numbers, and I do."

Van Sarawak chuckled. "I know a few places in my own sector," he replied, "but by and large, a pioneer society has little use for the finer arts of amusement. Very good, let's be off to New York, in — when?"

"1955. My public *persona* is established there already."

They grinned at each other and went off to pack. Everard had foresightedly brought along some mid-Twentieth garments in his friend's size.

Throwing clothes and razor into a small handbag, the American wondered if he could keep up with van Sarawak. He had never been a high-powered roisterer, and would hardly have known how to buckle a swash anywhere in space-time.

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A good book, a bull session, a case of beer, that was about his speed. But even the soberest of men must kick over the traces occasionally.

Briefly, he reflected on all he had seen and done. Sometimes it left him with a dreamlike feeling — that it should have happened to *him*, plain Manse Everard, engineer and ex-soldier; that his ostensible few months' work for the Engineering Studies Company should only have been a blind for a total of years' wandering through time.

Travel into the past involves an infinite discontinuity; it was the discovery of such a principle which made the travel possible in 19352 A.D. But that same discontinuity in the conservation-of-energy law permitted altering history. Not very easily; there were too many factors, the plenum tended to "return" to its "original" shape. But it could be done, and the man who changed the past which had produced him, though unaffected himself, wiped out the entire future. It had never even *been;* something else existed, another train of events. To protect themselves, the Daneelians had recruited the Patrol from all ages, a giant secret organization to police the time lanes. It gave assistance to legitimate traders, scientists, and tourists — that was its main function in practice; but always there was the watching for signs which meant that some mad or ambitious or careless traveler was tampering with a key event in space-time.

If it ever happened, if anyone ever got away with it . . . The room was comfortably heated, but Everard shivered. He and all his world would vanish, would not have existed at all. Language and logic broke down in the face of the paradox.

He dismissed the thought and went to join Piet van Sarawak.

Their little two-place scooter was waiting in the garage. It looked vaguely like a motorcycle mounted on skids, and an antigravity unit made it capable of flight. But the controls could be set for any place on Earth and any moment of time.

"*Auprès de ma blonde*
Qu'il fait bon, fait bon, fait bon,
Auprès de ma blonde
Qu'il fait bon dormir!"

Van Sarawak sang it aloud, his breath steaming from him in the frosty air, as he hopped onto the rear saddle. Everard laughed. "Down, boy!"

"Oh, come now," warbled the younger man. "It is a beautiful continuum, a gay and gorgeous cosmos. Hurry up this machine."

Everard was not so sure; he had seen enough human misery in all the ages. You got case-hardened after a while, but down underneath, when a peasant stared at you with sick brutalized eyes, or a soldier screamed with a pike through him, or a city went up in radioactive flame, something wept. He could understand the fanatics who had

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tried to write a new history. It was only that their work was so unlikely to make anything better. . . .

He set the controls for the Engineering Studies warehouse, a good confidential place to emerge. Thereafter they'd go to his apartment, and then the fun could start.

"I trust you've said goodby to all your lady friends here," he murmured.

"Oh, most gallantly, I assure you," answered van Sarawak. "Come along there. You're as slow as molasses on Pluto. For your information, this vehicle does not have to be rowed home."

Everard shrugged and threw the main switch. The garage blinked out of sight. But the warehouse did not appear around them.

For a moment, pure shock held them unstirring.

The scene registered in bits and pieces. They had materialized a few inches above ground level — only later did Everard think what would have happened if they'd come out in a solid object — and hit the pavement with a teeth-rattling bump. They were in some kind of square, a fountain jetting nearby. Around it, streets led off between buildings six to ten stories high, concrete, wildly painted and ornamented. There were automobiles, big clumsy-looking things of no recognizable type, and a crowd of people.

"Ye *gods!*" Everard glared at the meters. The scooter had landed them in lower Manhattan, 23 October 1955, at 11:30 A.M. There was a blustery wind carrying dust and grime, the smell of chimneys, and —

Van Sarawak's sonic stunner jumped into his fist. The crowd was milling away from them, shouting in some babble they couldn't understand. It was a mixed lot: tall fair roundheads, with a great deal of red hair; a number of Amerinds; half-breeds in all combinations. The men wore loose colorful blouses, tartan kilts, a sort of Scotch bonnet, shoes and high stockings. Their hair was long and many favored drooping mustaches. The women had full ankle-length skirts and hair coiled under hooded cloaks. Both sexes went in for jewelry, massive bracelets and necklaces.

"What happened?" whispered the Venusian. "Where are we?"

Everard sat rigid. His mind clicked over, whirling through all the eras he had known or read about. Industrial culture — those looked like steam cars, but why the sharp prows and figureheads? — coal-burning — post-nuclear Reconstruction? No, they hadn't worn kilts then, and they still spoke English —

It didn't fit. There was no such milieu recorded!

"We're getting out of here!"

His hands were on the controls when the big man jumped him. They went over on the pavement in a rage of fists and feet. Van

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Sarawak fired and sent someone else down unconscious; then he was seized from behind. The mob piled on top of them both, and things became hazy.

Everard had a confused impression of men in shining coppery breastplates and helmets, who shoved a billy-swinging way through the riot. He was fished out and supported while handcuffs were snapped on his wrists. Then he and van Sarawak were searched and hustled off to a big vehicle. The Black Maria is much the same in all times.

He didn't come out of it till they were in a damp and chilly cell with an iron-barred door.

"Name of a flame!" The Venusian slumped on a wooden cot and put his face in his hands.

Everard stood at the door, looking out. All he could see was a narrow concrete hall and the cell across it. The map of Ireland stared cheerfully through those bars and called something unintelligible.

"What's happened?" Van Sarawak's slim body shuddered.

"I don't know," said Everard very slowly. "I just don't know. That machine was supposed to be foolproof, but maybe we're bigger fools than they allowed for."

"There's no such place as this," said van Sarawak desperately. "A dream?" He pinched himself and lifted a rueful smile. His lip was cut and swelling, and he had the start of a gorgeous shiner. "Logically, my friend, a pinch is no test of reality, but it has a certain reassuring effect."

"I wish it didn't," said Everard.

He grabbed the rails, and the chain between his wrists rattled thinly. "Could the controls have been off, in spite of everything? Is there any city, anywhen on Earth — because I'm damned sure this is Earth, at least — any city, however obscure, which was ever like this?"

"Not to my knowledge," whispered van Sarawak.

Everard hung onto his sanity and rallied all the mental training the Patrol had ever given him. That included total recall . . . and he had studied history, even the history of ages he had never seen, with a thoroughness that should have earned him several Ph.D.'s.

"No," he said at last. "Kilted brachycephalic whites, mixed up with Indians and using steam-driven automboiles, haven't happened."

"Coordinator Stantel V," said van Sarawak faintly. "Thirty-eighth century. The Great Experimenter — colonies reproducing past societies —"

"Not any like this," said Everard.

The truth was growing in him like a cancer, and he would have traded his soul to know otherwise. It took all the will and strength he had to keep from screaming and bashing his brains out against the wall.

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"We'll have to see," he said in a flat tone.

A policeman — Everard supposed they were in the hands of the law — brought them a meal and tried to talk to them. Van Sarawak said the language sounded Celtic, but he couldn't make out more than a few words. The meal wasn't bad.

Toward evening, they were led off to a washroom and got cleaned up under official guns. Everard studied the weapons: eight-shot revolvers and long-barreled rifles. The facilities and the firearms, as well as the smell, suggested a technology roughly equivalent to the 19th century. There were gas lights, and Everard noticed that the brackets were cast in an elaborate intertwined pattern of vines and snakes.

On the way back, he spied a couple of signs on the walls. The script was obviously Semitic, but though van Sarawak had some knowledge of Hebrew through dealing with the Jewish colonies on Venus, he couldn't read it.

Locked in again, they saw the other prisoners led off to do their own washing — a surprisingly merry crowd of bums, toughs, and drunks. "Seems we get special treatment," remarked van Sarawak.

"Hardly astonishing," said Everard. "What would you do with total strangers who appeared out of nowhere and used unheard-of weapons?"

Van Sarawak's face turned to him with an unaccustomed grimness. "Are you thinking what I am thinking?" he asked.

"Probably."

The Venusian's mouth twisted, and horror rode his voice: "Another time line. Somebody *has* managed to change history."

Everard nodded. There was nothing else to do.

They spent an unhappy night. It would have been a boon to sleep, but the other cells were too noisy. Discipline seemed to be lax here. Also, there were bedbugs.

After a bleary breakfast, Everard and van Sarawak were allowed to wash again and shave. Then a ten-man guard marched them into an office and planted itself around the walls.

They sat down before a desk and waited. It was some time till the big wheels showed up. There were two: a white-haired, ruddy-cheeked man in cuirass and green tunic, presumably the chief of police; and a lean, hard-faced half-breed, gray-haired but black-mustached, wearing a blue tunic, a tam o'shanter, and insignia of rank — a golden bull's head. He would have had a certain hawklike dignity had it not been for the skinny hairy legs beneath his kilt. He was followed by younger men, armed and uniformed, who took up their places behind him as he sat down.

Everard leaned over and whispered: "The military, I'll bet. We seem to be of interest."

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Van Sarawak nodded sickly.

The police chief cleared his throat with conscious importance and said something to the — general? The latter turned impatiently and addressed himself to the prisoners. He barked his words out with a clarity that helped Everard get the phonemes, but with a manner that was not exactly reassuring.

Somewhere along the line, communication would have to be established. Everard pointed to himself. "Manse Everard," he said. Van Sarawak followed the lead and introduced himself similarly.

The general started and went into a huddle with the chief. Turning back, he snapped: "*Yrn Cimberland?*"

"No spikka da Inglees," said Everard.

"*Gothland? Svea? Nairoin Teutonach?*"

"Those names — if they are names — they sound a little Germanic, don't they?" muttered van Sarawak.

"So do our names, come to think of it," answered Everard tautly. "Maybe they think we're Germans." To the general: "*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" Blankness rewarded him. "*Taler ni svensk? Niederlands? Dönsk tunga? Parlez-vous français?* Goddammit, *¿habla usted español?*"

The police chief cleared his throat again and pointed to himself. "Cadwallader Mac Barca," he said. The general hight Cynyth ap Ceorn.

"Celtic, all right," said Everard. Sweat prickled under his arms. "But just to make sure —" He pointed inquiringly at a few other men, being rewarded with monickers like Hamilcar ap Angus, Asshur yr Cathlann, and Finn O'Carthia. "No . . . : there's a distinct Semitic element here too. That fits in with their alphabet —"

Van Sarawak's mouth was dry. "Try Classical languages," he urged harshly. "Maybe we can find out where this time went awry."

"*Loquerisne latine?*" That drew a blank. "Ἑλλευίξεις?"

General ap Ceorn started, blew out his mustache, and narrowed his eyes. "*Hellenach?*" he snapped. "*Yrn Parthia?*"

Everard shook his head. "They've at least heard of Greek," he said slowly. He tried a few more words, but no one knew the tongue.

Ap Ceorn growled something and spoke to one of his men, who bowed and went out. There was a long silence.

Everard found himself losing personal fear. He was in a bad spot, yes, and might not live very long; but anything that happened to him was ridiculously insignificant compared to what had been done to the entire world.

God in Heaven! To the universe!

He couldn't grasp it. Sharp in his mind rose the land he knew, broad plains and tall mountains and prideful cities. There was the grave image of his father, and yet he remembered being a small child and lifted up skyward while his

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father laughed beneath him. And his mother — they had a good life together, those two.

There had been a girl he knew in college, the sweetest little wench a man could ever have been privileged to walk in the rain with; and there was Bernie Aaronson, the long nights of beer and smoke and talk; Phil Brackney, who had picked him out of the mud in France when machine guns were raking a ruined field; Charlie and Mary Whitcomb, high tea and a low little fire in Victoria's London; a dog he had once had; the austere cantos of Dante and the ringing thunder of Shakespeare; the glory which was York Minster and the Golden Gate Bridge — Christ, a man's life, and the lives of who knew how many billions of human creatures, toiling and suffering and laughing and going down into dust to leave their sons behind them — *It had never been!*

He shook his head, dazed with grief, and sat devoid of real understanding.

The soldier came back with a map and spread it out on the desk. Ap Ceorn gestured curtly, and Everard and van Sarawak bent over it.

Yes . . . Earth, a Mercator projection, though eidetic memory showed that the mapping was rather crude. The continents and islands were there in bright colors, but the nations were something else.

"Can you read those names, Van?"

"I can make a guess, on the basis of the Hebraic alphabet," said the Venusian. He read out the alien words, filling in the gaps of his knowledge with what sounded logical.

North America down to about Colombia was Ynys yr Afallon, seemingly one country divided into states. South America was a big realm, Huy Braseal, with some smaller countries whose names looked Indian. Australasia, Indonesia, Borneo, Burma, eastern India, and a good deal of the Pacific belonged to Hinduraj. Afghanistan and the rest of India were Punjab. Han included China, Korea, Japan, and eastern Siberia. Littorn owned the rest of Russia and reached well into Europe. The British Isles were Brittys, France and the Low Countries Gallis, the Iberian peninsula Celtan. Central Europe and the Balkans were divided into many small states, some of which had Hunnish-looking names. Switzerland and Austria made up Helveti; Italy was Cimberland; the Scandinavian peninsula was split down the middle, Svea in the north and Gothland in the south. North Africa looked like a confederacy, reaching from Senegal to Suez and nearly to the equator under the name of Carthagalann; the southern continent was partitioned among small countries, many of which had purely African titles. The Near East held Parthia and Arabia.

Van Sarawak looked up. There were tears in his eyes.

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Ap Ceorn snarled a question and waved his finger about. He wanted to know where they were from.

Everard shrugged and pointed skyward. The one thing he could not admit was the truth. He and van Sarawak had agreed to claim they were from some other planet, since this world hardly had space travel.

Ap Ceorn spoke to the chief, who nodded and replied. The prisoners were returned to their cell.

"And now what?" Van Sarawak slumped on his cot and stared at the floor.

"We play along," said Everard grayly. "We do anything to get at our scooter and escape. Once we're free, we can take stock."

"But what happened?"

"I don't know, I tell you! Offhand it looks as if something upset the Roman Empire and the Celts took over, but I couldn't say what it was." Everard prowled the room. There was a bitter determination growing in him.

"Remember your basic theory," he said. "Events are the result of a complex. That's why it's so hard to change history. If I went back to, say, the Middle Ages, and shot one of FDR's Dutch forebears, he'd still be born in the Twentieth Century — because he and his genes resulted from the entire world of his ancestors, and there'd have been compensation. The first case I ever worked on was an attempt to alter things in the Fifth Century; we spotted evidence of it in the Twentieth, and went back and stopped the scheme.

"But every so often, there must be a really key event. Only with hindsight can we tell what it was, but some one happening was a nexus of so many world lines that its outcome was decisive for the whole future.

"Somehow, for some reason, somebody has ripped up one of those events back in the past."

"No more Hesperus City," whispered van Sarawak. "No more sitting by the canals in the blue twilight, no more Aphrodite vintages, no more — did you know I had a sister on Venus?"

"Shut up!" Everard almost shouted it. "I know. What counts is what to do.

"Look," he went on after a moment, "the Patrol and the Daneelians are wiped out. But such of the Patrol offices and resorts as antedate the switchpoint haven't been affected. There must be a few hundred agents we can rally."

"*If* we can get out of here."

"We can find that key event and stop whatever interference there was with it. We've got to!"

"A pleasant thought," mumbled van Sarawak, "but —"

Feet tramped outside, and a key clicked in the lock. The prisoners backed away. Then, all at once, van Sarawak was bowing and beaming and spilling gallantries. Even Everard had to gape.

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The girl who entered in front of three soldiers was a knockout. She was tall, with a sweep of rusty-red hair past her shoulders to the slim waist; her eyes were green and alight, her face came from all the Irish colleens who had ever lived, the long white dress was snug around a figure meant to stand on the walls of Troy. Everard noticed vaguely that this time-line used cosmetics, but she had small need of them. He paid no attention to the gold and amber of her jewelry, or to the guns behind her.

She smiled, a little timidly, and spoke: "Can you understand me? It was thought you might know Greek —"

The language was classical rather than modern. Everard, who had once had a job in Alexandrine times, could follow it through her accent if he paid close heed — which was inevitable anyway.

"Indeed I do," he replied, his words stumbling over each other.

"What are you snakkering?" demanded van Sarawak.

"Ancient Greek," said Everard.

"It would be," mourned van Sarawak. His despair seemed to have vanished, and his eyes bugged.

Everard introduced himself and his companion. The girl said her name was Deirdre Mac Morn. "Oh, no," groaned van Sarawak. "This is too much. Manse, you've got to teach me Greek, and fast."

"Shut up," said Everard. "This is serious business."

"Well, but why should you have all the pleasure —"

Everard ignored him and invited the girl to sit down. He joined her on a cot, while the other Patrolman hovered unhappily close. The guards kept their weapons ready.

"Is Greek still a living language?" asked Everard.

"Only in Parthia, and there it is most corrupt," said Deirdre. "I am a Classical scholar, among other things. *Saorann* ap Ceorn is my uncle, so he asked me to see if I could talk with you. There are not many in Afallon who know the Attic tongue."

"Well . . ." Everard suppressed a silly grin. "I am most grateful to your uncle."

Her eyes rested gravely on him. "Where are you from? And how does it happen that you speak only Greek, of all known languages?"

"I speak Latin too."

"Latin?" She frowned briefly. "Oh, yes. The Roman speech, was it not? I'm afraid you'll find no one who knows much about it."

"Greek will do," said Everard.

"But you have not told me whence you came," she insisted.

Everard shrugged. "We've not been treated very courteously," he hinted.

"Oh . . . I'm sorry." It seemed genuine. "But our people are so excitable — especially now, with the international situation what it is. And when you two appeared out of thin air —"

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Everard nodded grimly. The international situation? That had a familiar ring. "What do you mean?" he inquired.

"Oh, surely . . . of course you know. With Huy Braseal and Hinduraj about to go to war, and all of us wondering what will happen — It is not easy to be a small power."

"A small power? But I saw a map, and Afallon looked big enough to me."

"We wore ourselves out two hundred years ago, in the great war with Littorn. Now none of our confederated states can agree on a single policy." Deirdre looked directly into his eyes. "What is this ignorance of yours?"

Everard swallowed and said: "We're from another world."

"What?"

"Yes. A . . . planet of Sirius."

"But Sirius is a star!"

"Of course."

"How can a star have planets?"

"How — But it does! A star is a sun like —"

Deirdre shrank back and made a sign with her finger. "The Great Baal aid us," she whispered. "Either you are mad, or — The stars are mounted in a crystal sphere."

Oh, no! Everard asked slowly: "What of the planets you can see — Mars and Venus and —"

"I know not those names. If you mean Moloch, Ashtoreth, and the rest, of course they are worlds like ours. One holds the spirits of the dead, one is the home of witches, one —"

All this and steam cars too. Everard smiled shakily. "If you'll not believe me, then what do you think?"

Deirdre regarded him with large eyes. "I think you must be sorcerers," she said.

There was no answer to that. Everard asked a few weak questions, but learned little more than that this city was Catuvellaunan, a trading and manufacturing center; Deirdre estimated its population at two million, and that of all Afallon at fifty millions, but it was only a guess — they didn't take censuses in this world.

The prisoners' fate was also indeterminate. Their machine and other possessions had been sequestrated by the military, but nobody dared to monkey with them, and treatment of the owners was being hotly debated. Everard got the impression that all government, including the leadership of the armed forces, was a sloppy process of individualistic wrangling. Afallon itself was the loosest of confederacies, built out of former nations — Brittic colonies and Indians who had adopted white culture — all jealous of their rights. The old Mayan Empire, destroyed in a war with Texas (Tehannach) and annexed, had not forgotten its time of glory, and sent the most rambunctious delegates of all to the Council of Suffetes.

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The Mayans wanted an alliance with Huy Braseal, perhaps out of friendship for fellow Indians. The West Coast states, fearful of Hinduraj, were toadies of the Southeast Asian empire. The Middle West — of course — was isolationist, and the Eastern states were torn every which way but inclined to follow the lead of Brittys.

When he gathered that slavery existed here, though not on racial lines, Everard wondered briefly if the guilty time travelers might not have been Dixiecrats.

Enough! He had his own and Van's necks to think about. "We are from Sirius," he declared loftily. "Your ideas about the stars are mistaken. We came as peaceful explorers, and if we are molested there will be others of our kind to take vengeance."

Deirdre looked so unhappy that he felt conscience-stricken. "Will you spare the children?" she whispered. "They had nothing to do with it." Everard could imagine the frightful vision in her head, helpless captives led off in chains to the slave markets of a world of witches.

"There need be no trouble at all if we are released and our property returned," he said.

"I shall speak to my uncle," she promised, "but even if I can sway him, he is only one on the Council. The thought of what your weapons could mean if we had them has driven men mad."

She rose. Everard clasped her hands; they lay warm and soft in his, and smiled crookedly at her. "Buck up, kid," he said in English. She shivered and made the hex sign again.

"Well," said van Sarawak when they were alone, "what did you find out?" After being told, he stroked his chin and murmured thoughtfully: "That was one sweet little collection of sinusoids. There could be worse worlds than this."

"Or better," said Everard bleakly. "They don't have atomic bombs, but neither do they have penicillin. It's not our job to play God."

"No . . . no, I suppose not." The Venusian sighed.

They spent a restless day. Night had fallen when lanterns glimmered in the corridor and a military guard unlocked the cell. The prisoners' handcuffs were removed, and they were led silently to a rear exit. A car waited, with another for escort, and the whole troop drove wordlessly off.

Catuvellaunan did not have outdoor lighting, and there wasn't much night traffic. Somehow, that made the sprawling city unreal in the dark. Everard leaned back and concentrated on the mechanics of his vehicle. Steam-powered, as he had guessed, burning powdered coal; rubber-tired wheels; a sleek body with a sharp nose and a serpent figurehead; the whole simple to operate but not too well designed. Apparently this world had gradually developed a rule-of-thumb mechanics,

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but no systematic science worth mentioning.

They crossed a clumsy iron bridge to Long Island, here as at home a residential section for the well-to-do. Their speed was high despite the dimness of their oil-lamp headlights, and twice they came near having an accident — no traffic signals, and seemingly no drivers who did not hold caution in contempt.

Government and traffic . . . hm. It all looked French, somehow, and even in Everard's own Twentieth Century France was largely Celtic. He was no respecter of windy theories about inborn racial traits, but there was something to be said for traditional attitudes so ancient that they were unconsciously accepted. A Western world in which the Celts had become dominant, the Germanic peoples reduced to two small outposts . . . Yes, look at the Ireland of home; or recall how tribal politics had queered Vercingetorix's revolt. . . . But what about Littorn? Wait a minute! In *his* early Middle Ages, Lithuania had been a powerful state; it had held off Germans, Poles, and Russians alike for a long time, and hadn't even taken Christianity till the Fifteenth Century. Without German competition, Lithuania might very well have advanced eastward —

In spite of the Celtic political instability, this was a world of large states, fewer separate nations than Everard's. That argued an older society. If his own Western civilization had developed out of the decaying Roman Empire about, say, 600 A.D., the Celts in this world must have taken over earlier than that.

Everard was beginning to realize what had happened to Rome. . . .

The cars drew up before an ornamental gate set in a long stone wall. There was an interchange with two armed guards wearing the livery of a private estate and the thin steel collars of slaves. The gate was opened, and the cars went along a graveled driveway between trees and lawns and hedgerows. At the far end, almost on the beach, stood a house. Everard and van Sarawak were gestured out and led toward it.

It was a rambling wooden structure. Gas lamps on the porch showed it painted in gaudy stripes; the gables and beam-ends were carved into dragon heads. Behind it murmured the sea, and there was enough starlight for Everard to make out a ship standing in close — presumably a freighter, with a tall smokestack and a figurehead.

Light glowed through the windows. A slave butler admitted the party. The interior was paneled in dark wood, also carved, the floors thickly carpeted. At the end of the hall there was a living room with overstuffed furniture, several paintings in a stiff conventionalized style, and a merry blaze in a great stone fireplace.

Saorann Cynyth ap Ceorn sat in one chair, Deirdre in another. She

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laid aside a book as they entered and rose, smiling. The officer puffed a cigar and glowered. There were some words swapped, and the guards disappeared. The butler fetched in wine on a tray, and Deirdre invited the Patrolmen to sit down.

Everard sipped from his glass — the wine was an excellent Burgundy type — and asked bluntly: "Why are we here?"

Deirdre smiled, dazzlingly this time, and chuckled. "Surely you find it more pleasant than the jail."

"Oh, yes. But I still want to know. Are we being released?"

"You are . . ." She hunted for a diplomatic answer, but there seemed to be too much frankness in her. "You are welcome here, but may not leave the estate. We had hopes you could be persuaded to help us. There would be rich reward."

"Help? How?"

"By showing our artisans and wizards the spells to make more machines and weapons like your own."

Everard sighed. It was no use trying to explain. They didn't have the tools to make the tools to make what was needed, but how could he get that across to a folk who believed in witchcraft?

"Is this your uncle's home?" he asked.

"No," said Deirdre. "It is my own. I am the only child of my parents, who were wealthy nobles and died last year."

Ap Ceorn snapped something, and Deirdre translated with a worried frown: "The tale of your magical advent is known to all Catuvellaunan by now; and that includes the foreign spies. We hope you can remain hidden from them here."

Everard, remembering the pranks Axis and Allies had played in little neutral nations like Portugal, shivered. Men made desperate by approaching war would not likely be as courteous as the Afallonians.

"What is this conflict going to be about?" he inquired.

"The control of the Icenian Ocean, of course. Particularly, certain rich islands we call Yyns yr Lyonnach —" Deirdre got up in a single flowing movement and pointed out Hawaii on a globe. "You see," she went on earnestly, "as I told you, the western countries like Brittys, Gallis, and ourselves, fighting Littorn, have worn each other out. Our domains have shrunken, and the newer states like Huy Braseal and Hinduraj are now expanding and quarreling. They will draw in the lesser nations, for it is not only a clash of ambitions but of systems — the monarchy of Hinduraj and the sun-worshipping theocracy of Huy Braseal."

"What is your religion?" asked Everard.

Deirdre blinked. The question seemed almost meaningless to her. "The more educated people think that there is a Great Baal who made all the lesser gods," she answered at last, slowly. "But naturally, we pay our respects to the

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foreign gods too, Littorn's Perkunas and Czernebog, the Sun of the southerners, Wotan Ammon of Cimberland, and so on. They are very powerful."

"I see. . . ."

Ap Ceorn offered cigars and matches. Van Sarawak inhaled and said querulously: "Damn it, this would-have to be a time line where they don't speak any language I know." He brightened. "But I'm pretty quick to learn, even without hypnos. I'll get Deirdre to teach me."

"You and me both," said Everard hastily. "But listen, Van —" He reported what had been said.

"Hm." The younger man rubbed his chin. "Not so good, eh? Of course, if they'd just let us at our scooter, we could take off at once. Why not play along with them?"

"They're not such fools," answered Everard. "They may believe in magic, but not in undiluted altruism."

"Funny . . . that they should be so backward intellectually, and still have combustion engines."

"No. It's quite understandable. That's why I asked about their religion. It's always been purely pagan; even Judaism seems to have disappeared. As Whitehead pointed out, the medieval idea of one almighty God was important to science, by inculcating the notion of lawfulness in nature. And Mumford added that the early monasteries were probably responsible for the mechanical clock — a very basic invention — because of having regular hours for prayer. Clocks seem to have come late in this world." Everard smiled wryly, but there was a twisting sadness in him. "Odd to talk that way. Whitehead and Mumford never lived. If Jesus did, his message has been lost."

"Still —"

"Just a minute." Everard turned to Deirdre. "When was Afallon discovered?"

"By white men? In the year 4827."

"Um . . . when does your reckoning start from?"

Deirdre seemed immune to further startlement. "The creation of the world — at least, the date some philosophers have given. That is 5959 years ago."

4004 B.C. . . . Yes, definitely a Semitic element in this culture. The Jews had presumably gotten their traditional date from Babylon; but Everard doubted that the Jews were the Semites in question here.

"And when was steam (*pneuma*) first used to drive engines?"

"About a thousand years ago. The great Druid Boroihme O'Fiona —"

"Never mind." Everard smoked his cigar and mulled his thoughts for a while. Then he turned back to van Sarawak.

"I'm beginning to get the picture," he said. "The Gauls were anything but the barbarians most people think. They'd learned a lot from Phoenician traders and Greek

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colonists, as well as from the Etruscans in Cisalpine Gaul. A very energetic and enterprising race. The Romans, on the other hand, were a stolid lot, with few intellectual interests. There was very little technological progress in our world till the Dark Ages, when the Empire had been swept out of the way.

"In *this* history, the Romans vanished early and the Gauls got the power. They started exploring, building better ships, discovering America in the 9th century. But they weren't so far ahead of the Indians that those couldn't catch up . . . even be stimulated to build empires of their own, like Huy Braseal today. In the 11th century, the Celts began tinkering with steam engines. They seem to have got gunpowder too, maybe from China, and to have made several other inventions; but it's all been cut-and-dry, with no basis of real science."

Van Sarawak nodded. "I suppose you're right. But what did happen to Rome?"

"I'm not sure . . . yet . . . but our key point is back there somewhere."

Everard returned to Deirdre. "This may surprise you," he said smoothly. "Our people visited this world about 2500 years ago. That's why I speak Greek but don't know what has occurred since. I would like to find out from you — I take it you're quite a scholar."

She flushed and lowered long dark lashes. "I will be glad to help as much as I can." With a sudden appeal that cut at his heart: "But will you help us in return?"

"I don't know," said Everard heavily. "I'd like to, but I don't know if we can."

Because after all, my job is to condemn you and your entire world to death.

When Everard was shown to his room, he discovered that local hospitality was more than generous. He was too tired and depressed to take advantage of it . . . but at least, he thought on the edge of sleep, Van's slave girl wouldn't be disappointed.

They got up early here. From his upstairs window, Everard saw guards pacing the beach, but they didn't detract from the morning's freshness. He came down with van Sarawak to breakfast, where bacon and eggs, toast and coffee added the last incongruous note of dream. Ap Ceorn was gone back to town to confer, said Deirdre; she herself had put wistfulness aside and chattered gaily of trivia. Everard learned that she belonged to a dramatic group which sometimes gave plays in the original Greek — hence her fluency; she liked to ride, hunt, sail, swim — "And shall we?" she asked.

"Huh?"

"Swim, of course!" Deirdre sprang from her chair on the lawn, where they had been sitting under flame-

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colored leaves in the wan autumn sunlight, and whirled innocently out of her clothes. Everard thought he heard a dull clunk as van Sarawak's jaw hit the ground.

"Come!" she laughed. "Last one in is a Sassenach!"

She was already tumbling in the cold gray waves when Everard and van Sarawak shuddered their way down to the beach. The Venusian groaned. "I come from a warm planet," he objected. "My ancestors were Indonesians — tropical birds."

"There were some Dutchmen too, weren't there?" grinned Everard.

"They had the sense to go to Indonesia."

"All right, stay ashore."

"Hell! If she can do it, I can!" Van Sarawak put a toe in the water and groaned again.

Everard summoned up all the psychosomatic control he had ever learned and ran in. Deirdre threw water at him. He plunged, got hold of a slender leg, and pulled her under. They tumbled about for several minutes before running back to the house. Van Sarawak followed.

"Speak about Tantalus," he mumbled. "The most beautiful girl in the whole continuum, and I can't talk to her and she's half polar bear."

Everard stood quiet before the living-room fire, while slaves toweled him dry and dressed him in the local garb. "What pattern is this?" he asked, pointing to the tartan of his kilt.

Deirdre lifted her ruddy head. "My own clan's," she answered. "A house guest is always taken as a clan member during his stay, even if there is a blood feud going on." She smiled shyly. "And there is none between us, Manslach."

It cast him back into bleakness. He remembered what his purpose was.

"I'd like to ask you about history," he said. "It is a special interest of mine."

She nodded, adjusted a gold fillet on her hair, and got a book from a crowded shelf. "This is the best world history, I think. I can look up details you might wish to know."

And tell me what I must do to destroy you. Seldom had Everard felt himself so much a skunk.

He sat down with her on a couch. The butler wheeled in lunch, and he ate moodily.

To follow up his notion — "Did Rome and Carthage ever fight a war?"

"Yes. Two, in fact. They were allied at first, against Epirus. Then they fell out. Rome won the first war and tried to restrict Carthaginian enterprise." Her clean profile bent over the pages, like a studious child. "The second war broke out twenty-three years later, and lasted . . . hm . . . eleven years all told, though the last three were only mopping up after Hannibal had taken and burned Rome."

Ah-hah! Somehow, Everard did not feel happy about it.

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The Second Punic War, or rather some key incident thereof, was the turning point. But — partly out of curiosity, partly because he feared to tip his hand — Everard did not ask for particulars. He'd first have to get straight in his mind what had actually happened, anyway. (No . . . what had not happened. The reality was here, warm and breathing beside him, and he was the ghost.)

"So what came next?" he inquired tonelessly.

"There was a Carthaginian Empire, including Spain, southern Gaul, and the toe of Italy," she said. "The rest of Italy was impotent and chaotic, after the Roman confederacy had been broken up. But the Carthaginian government was too venal to endure; Hannibal himself was assassinated by men who thought him too honest. Meanwhile, Syria and Parthia fought for the eastern Mediterranean, with Parthia winning.

"About a hundred years after the Punic Wars, some Germanic tribes invaded and conquered Italy." (Yes . . . that would be the Cimbri, with their allies the Teutones and Ambrones, whom Marius had stopped in Everard's world.) "Their destructive path through Gaul set the Celts moving too, into Spain and North Africa as Carthage declined; and from Carthage the Gauls learned much.

"There followed a long period of wars, during which Parthia waned and the Celtic states grew. The Huns broke the Germans in middle Europe, but were in turn scattered by Parthia, so the Gauls moved in and the only Germans left were in Italy and Hyperborea." (That must be the Scandinavian peninsula.) "As ships improved, there was trade around Africa with India and China. The Celtanians discovered Afallon, which they thought was an island — hence the 'Ynys' — but were thrown out by the Mayans. The Brittic colonies further north had better luck, and eventually won their independence.

"Meanwhile Littorn was growing vastly. It swallowed up central Europe and Hyperborea for a while, and those countries only regained their freedom as part of the peace settlement after the Hundred Years' War you know of. The Asian countries have shaken off their European masters and modernized themselves, while the Western nations have declined in their turn." Deirdre looked up. "But this is only the barest outline. Shall I go on?"

Everard shook his head. "No, thanks." After a moment: "You are very honest about the situation of your own country."

Deirdre shrugged. "Most of us won't admit it, but I think it best to look truth in the eyes."

With a surge of eagerness: "But tell me of your own world. This is a marvel past belief."

Everard sighed, turned off his conscience, and began lying.

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The raid took place that afternoon.

Van Sarawak had recovered himself and was busily learning the Afallonian language from Deirdre. They walked through the garden hand in hand, stopping to name objects and act out verbs. Everard followed, wondering vaguely if he was a third wheel or not, most of him bent to the problem of how to get at the scooter.

Bright sunlight spilled from a pale cloudless sky. A maple stood like a shout of scarlet, and a drift of yellow leaves scudded across sere grass. An elderly slave was raking the yard in a leisurely fashion, a young-looking guard of Indian race lounged with his rifle slung on one shoulder, a pair of wolfhounds dozed with dignity under a hedge. It was a peaceful scene — hard to believe that men schemed murder beyond these walls.

But man was man, in any history. This culture might not have the ruthless will and sophisticated cruelty of Western civilization; in some ways it looked strangely innocent. Still, that wasn't for lack of trying; and in this world, a genuine science might never emerge, man might endlessly repeat the weary cycle of war, empire, collapse, and war. In Everard's future, the race had finally broken out of it.

For what? He could not honestly say that this new continuum was worse or better than his own. It was different, that was all; and didn't these people have as much right to their existence as — as his own, who were damned to nullity if he failed to act?

He shook his head and felt fists knot at his side. It was too big. No man should have to decide something like this.

In the showdown, he knew, it would be no abstract sense of duty which compelled him, but the little things and the little folk he remembered.

They rounded the house and Deirdre pointed to the sea. "*Awarlann*," she said. Her loose hair was flame in the wind.

"Now does that mean 'ocean' or 'Atlantic' or 'water'?" asked van Sarawak, laughing. "Let's go see." He led her toward the beach.

Everard trailed. A kind of steam launch, long and fast, was skipping over the waves, a mile or so offshore. Gulls flew up in a shrieking snowstorm of wings. He thought that if he'd been in charge, there would have been a Navy ship on picket out there.

Did he even have to decide anything? There were other Patrolmen in the pre-Roman past. They'd return to their respective eras and —

Everard stiffened. A chill ran down his back and into his belly.

They'd return, and see what had happened, and try to correct the trouble. If any of them succeeded, this world would blink out of space-time, and he would go with it.

Deirdre paused. Everard, standing

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in a cold sweat, hardly noticed what she was staring at, till she cried out and pointed. Then he joined her and squinted across the sea.

The launch was coming in close, its high stack fuming smoke and sparks, the gilt snake figurehead agleam. He could see the dwarfed forms of men aboard, and something white, with wings. It rose from the poopdeck and trailed at the end of a rope, mounting. A glider! Celtic aeronautics had gotten that far, at least —

"Pretty thing," said van Sarawak. "I suppose they have balloons too."

The glider cast its tow and swooped inward. One of the guards on the beach shouted. The rest came running from behind the house, sunlight flashed off their guns. The launch sped for the shore and the glider landed, plowing a furrow in the beach.

An officer yelled, waving the Patrolmen back. Everard had a glimpse of Deirdre's face, white and uncomprehending. Then a turret on the glider swiveled — a detached part of his mind assumed it was manually operated — and a cannon spoke.

Everard hit the dirt. Van Sarawak followed, dragging the girl with him. Grapeshot plowed hideously through the Afallonian soldiers.

There came a spiteful crack of guns. Men were emerging from the aircraft, dark-faced men in turbans and sarongs. *Hinduraj!* thought Everard. They traded shots with the surviving guards, who rallied about their captain.

That man roared and led a charge. Everard looked up to see him almost at the glider and its crew. Van Sarawak leaped up and ran to join the fight. Everard rolled over, caught his leg, and pulled him down.

"Let me *go!*" The Venusian writhed. There was a sobbing in his throat. The racket of battle seemed to fill the sky.

"No, you bloody fool! It's us they're after, and that wild Irishman did the worst thing he could have —" Everard slapped his friend's face and looked up.

The launch, shallow-draught and screw-propelled, had run up to the beach and was retching armed men. The Afallonians realized too late that they had discharged their weapons and were being attacked from the rear.

"Come on!" Everard yanked Deirdre and van Sarawak to their feet. "We've got to get out of here — get to the neighbors —"

A detachment of the boat crew saw him and veered. He felt rather than heard the flat smack of a bullet into turf. Slaves were screaming around the house. The two wolfhounds charged and were gunned down.

Everard whirled to flee. Crouched, zigzag, that was the way, over the wall and out onto the road! He might have made it, but Deirdre stumbled and fell. Van Sarawak

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halted and stood over her with a snarl. Everard plunged to a stop, and by that time it was too late. They were covered.

The leader of the dark men snapped something at the girl. She sat up, giving him a defiant answer. He laughed shortly and jerked his thumb at the launch.

"What do they want?" asked Everard in Greek.

"You." She looked at him with horror. "You two—" The officer spoke. "And me to translate—No!"

She twisted in the arms that held her and clawed at a man's face. Everard's fist traveled in a short arc that ended in a lovely squashing of nose. It was too good to last: a clubbed rifle descended on his head, and he was only dimly aware of being carried off to the launch.

The crew left the glider behind, shoved their boat into deeper water, and revved it up. They left all the guardsmen slain, but took their own casualties along.

Everard sat on a bench on the plunging deck and stared with slowly clearing eyes as the shoreline dwindled. Deirdre wept on van Sarawak's shoulder, and the Venusian tried to console her. A chill noisy wind blew across indifferent waves, spindrift stung their faces.

It was when the two white men emerged from a cabin that Everard's mind was jarred back into motion. Not Asians after all — these were Europeans. And the rest of the crew had Caucasian features . . . grease paint!

He regarded his new owners warily. One was a portly, middle-aged man of average height, in a red silk blouse and baggy white trousers and a sort of astrakhan hat; he was clean-shaven and his dark hair was twisted into a queue. The other was somewhat younger, a shaggy blond giant in a tunic sewn with copper links, legginged breeches, a leather cloak, and a horned helmet. Both wore revolvers at their belts and were treated deferentially.

"What the devil—" Everard looked around. They were already out of sight of land and bending north. The engine made the hull quiver, spray sheeted when the bows bit into a wave.

The older man spoke first in Afallonian. Everard shrugged. Then the bearded Nordic tried, first in a completely unrecognizable dialect but afterward: "*Taelan thu Cimbric?*"

Everard, who knew German, Swedish, and Anglo-Saxon, took a chance, while van Sarawak pricked up his Dutch ears. Deirdre huddled back wide-eyed, too bewildered to move.

"*Ja*," said Everard, "*ein wenig.*" When Goldilocks looked uncertain, he amended it: "A little."

"*Ah, aen litt. Gode!*" The big man rubbed hairy hands. "*Ik hait Boierik Wulfilasson ok main gefreond heer erran Boleslav Arkonsky.*"

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It was not any language Everard had ever heard of — it couldn't even be the original Cimbrian, after all these centuries — but the Patrolman could follow it tolerably well. The trouble would be in speaking; he couldn't predict how it had evolved.

"What the hell erran thu maching, anyway?" he blustered. "Ik bin aen man auf Sirius — the stern Sirius, mit planeten ok all. Set uns gebach or willen be der Teufel to pay!"

Boierik Wulfilasson looked pained and suggested that the discussion be continued inside, with the young lady for interpreter. He led the way back into the cabin, which turned out to be small but comfortably furnished. The door remained open, with an armed guard looking in and more on call.

Boleslav Arkonsky said something in Afallonian to Deirdre. She nodded, and he gave her a glass of wine. It seemed to steady her, but she spoke to Everard in a thin voice.

"We've been taken, Manslach. Their spies found out where you were kept. Another group is supposed to capture your machine — they know where that is, too."

"So I imagined," replied Everard. "But who in Baal's name are they?"

Boierik guffawed at the question and expounded lengthily on his own cleverness. The idea was to make the Suffetes of Afallon think that Hinduraj was responsible. Actually, the secret alliance of Littorn and Cimberland had built up quite an effective spy service of its own. They were now bound for the Littornian Embassy's summer retreat on Ynys Llangollen (Nantucket), where the wizards would be induced to explain their spells and the great powers get a surprise.

"And if we don't . . . ?"

Deirdre translated Arkonsky's answer word for word: "I regret the consequences to you. We are civilized men, and will pay well in gold and honor for your free cooperation; but the existence of our countries is at stake."

Everard looked at them. Boierik seemed embarrassed and unhappy, the boastful glee evaporated from him. Boleslav Arkonsky drummed on the table, his lips compressed but a certain mute appeal in his eyes. *Don't make us do this. We have to live with ourselves.*

They were probably husbands and fathers, they must enjoy a mug of beer and a friendly game of dice as well as the next man, maybe Boierik bred horses in Italy and Arkonsky was a rose fancier on the Baltic shores. But none of it would do their captives a bit of good, not when the almighty Nation locked horns with its kin.

Everard paused briefly to admire the sheer artistry of this operation and began wondering what to do. The launch was fast, but would need something like twenty hours to reach Nantucket if he remem-

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bered the trip. There was that much time at least.

"We are weary," he said in English. "May we not rest a while?"

"*Ja, deedly*," said Boierik with a clumsy graciousness. "*Ok wir skallen gode gefreonds bin, ni?*"

Sunset smoldered redly to the west. Deirdre and van Sarawak stood at the rail, looking across a gray waste of waters. Three crewmen, their brown paint and Asian garments removed, poised alert and weaponed on the poop; a man steered by compass; Boierik and Everard paced the quarterdeck, talking. All wore heavy cloaks against a stiff, stinging wind.

Everard was getting some proficiency in the Cimbrian language; his tongue still limped, but he could make himself understood. Mostly, though, he let Boierik do the talking.

"So you are from the stars? These matters I do not understand. I am a simple man. Had I my way, I would manage my Tuscan estate in peace and let the world rave as it will. But we of the Folk have our obligations." The Teutons seemed to have replaced the Latins altogether in Italy, as the Saxons had done the Britons in Everard's world.

"I know how you feel," said the Patrolman. "It is a strange thing, that so many should fight when so few want to."

"Oh, but it is necessary." Almost a whine there. "You don't understand. Carthagalann stole Egypt, our rightful possession."

"*Italia irredenta*," murmured Everard.

"Huh?"

"Never mind. So you Cimbri are allied with Littorn, and hope to grab off Europe and Africa while the big powers are fighting in the East."

"Not at all!" replied Boierik indignantly. "We are merely asserting our rightful and historic territorial claims. Why, the king himself said —" And so on and so on.

Everard braced himself against the roll of the deck. "It seems to me that you treat us wizards rather hardily," he declared. "Beware lest we get really angered at you."

"All of us are protected against curses and shapings."

"Well —"

"I wish you would help us freely," said Boierik. "I will be happy to demonstrate to you the justice of our cause, if you have a few hours to spare."

Everard shook his head and stopped by Deirdre. Her face was a blur in the thickening dusk, but he caught a forlorn defiance in her voice: "I hope you are telling him what to do with his plans, Manslach."

"No," said Everard heavily. "We are going to help them."

She stood as if struck.

"What are you saying, Manse?" asked van Sarawak.

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Everard told him.

"No!" said the Venusian.

"Yes," said Everard.

"By God, no! I'll —"

Everard grabbed his arm and said coldly: "Be still. I know what I'm doing. We can't take sides in this world, we're against everybody and you'd better realize it. The only thing to do is play along with these fellows for a while. And don't tell that to Deirdre."

Van Sarawak bent his head and stood for a moment, thinking. "All right," he said dully.

The Littornian resort was on the southern shore of Nantucket, near a fishing village but walled off from it. The embassy had built in the style of its homeland, long timber houses with roofs arched like a cat's back, a main hall and its outbuildings enclosing a flagged courtyard. Everard finished a night's sleep and a breakfast made miserable by Deirdre's eyes by standing on deck as they came to the private pier. Another, bigger launch was already there, and the grounds swarmed with hard-looking men. Arkonsky's eyes kindled, and he said in Afallonian: "I see the magic engine has been brought. We can go right to work."

When Boierik interpreted, Everard felt his heart slam.

The guests, as the Cimbrian insisted on calling them, were led into a great room where Arkonsky bent the knee to an idol with four faces, that Svantevit which the Danes had chopped up for firewood in the other history. There was a blaze on the hearth against the autumn chill, and guards posted around the walls. Everard had eyes only for the scooter, where it stood gleaming on the floor.

"I hear it was a hard fight in Catuvellaunan," remarked Boierik to him. "Many were killed, but our folk got away without being followed." He touched a handlebar gingerly. "And this wain can truly appear anywhere it wishes, out of thin air?"

"Yes," said Everard.

Deirdre gave him a look of scorn such as he had never known. She stood haughtily away from him and van Sarawak.

Arkonsky spoke to her, something he wanted translated. She spat at his feet. Boierik sighed and gave the word to Everard:

"We wish the engine demonstrated. You and I will go for a ride on it. I warn you, I will have a revolver at your back; you will tell me in advance everything you mean to do, and if aught untoward happens I will shoot. Your friends will remain here as hostages, also to be shot on the first suspicion. But I'm sure we will all be good friends."

Everard nodded. There was a tautness thrumming in him, and his palms felt cold and wet. "First I must say a spell," he answered.

His eyes flicked. One glance

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memorized the spatial reading of the position meters and the time reading of the clock on the scooter. Another look showed van Sarawak seated on a bench, under Arkonsky's drawn pistol and the rifles of the guards; Deirdre sat down too, stiffly, as far from him as she could get. Everard made a close estimate of the bench's position relative to the scooter's, lifted his arms, and chanted in Temporal:

"Van, I'm going to try to pull you out of here. Stay exactly where you are now; repeat, exactly. I'll pick you up on the fly. If all goes well, that'll happen about one minute after I blink out of here with our shaggy comrade."

The Venusian sat wooden-faced. There was a thin beading of sweat on his forehead.

"Very good," said Everard in his pidgin Cimbrian. "Mount on the rear saddle, Boierik, and we'll put this magic horse through her paces."

The big man nodded and obeyed. As Everard took the front seat, he felt a gun muzzle held shakily against his back. "Tell Arkonsky we'll be back in half an hour," he added; they had approximately the same time units here as in his world, both descended from the Babylonian. When that had been taken care of, Everard said: "The first thing we will do is appear in midair over the ocean and hover."

"F-f-fine," said Boierik. He didn't sound very convinced.

Everard set the space controls for ten miles east and a thousand feet up and threw the main switch.

They sat like witches astride a broom, looking down on a greenish-gray sweep of waters and the distant blur which was land. The wind was high, it caught at them and Everard gripped tight with his knees. He heard Boierik's oath and smiled wanly.

"Well," he asked, "how do you like this?"

"It . . . it is wonderful." As he grew accustomed to the idea, the Cimbrian gathered enthusiasm. "Why, with machines like this, we can soar above enemy cities and pelt them with fire."

Somehow, that made Everard feel better about what he was going to do.

"Now we will fly ahead," he announced, and sent the scooter gliding through the air. Boierik whooped exuberantly. "And now we will make the instantaneous jump to your homeland."

Everard threw the maneuver switch. The scooter looped the loop and dropped at a three-gee acceleration.

Forewarned, the Patrolman could still barely hang on. He never knew whether the curve or the dive had thrown Boierik; he only had a moment's hideous glimpse of the man plunging down through windy spaces to the sea.

For a little while, then, Everard hung above the waves. His first reaction was a cold shudder . . .

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suppose Boierik had had time to shoot? His second was a gray guilt. Both he dismissed, and concentrated on the problem of rescuing van Sarawak.

He set the space verniers for one foot in front of the prisoners' bench, the time unit for one minute after he had departed. His right hand he kept by the controls — he'd have to work fast — and his left free.

Hang on to your seats, fellahs. Here we go again.

The machine flashed into existence almost in front of van Sarawak. Everard clutched the Venusian's tunic and hauled him close, inside the spatiotemporal field, even as his right hand spun the time dial back and snapped over the main switch.

A bullet caromed off metal. Everard had a moment's glimpse of Arkonsky shouting. And then it was all gone and they were on a grassy hill sloping down to the beach. It was 2,000 years ago.

He collapsed shivering over the handlebars.

A cry brought him back to awareness. He twisted around, looking at van Sarawak where the Venusian sprawled on the hillside. One arm was still around Deirdre's waist.

The wind lulled, and the sea rolled into a broad white strand, and clouds walked high in heaven.

"I can't say I blame you, Van." Everard paced before the scooter and looked at the ground. "But it does complicate matters greatly."

"What was I supposed to do?" There was a raw note in the other's voice. "Leave her there for those bastards to kill — or to be snuffed out with her entire universe?"

"In case you've forgotten, we're conditioned against revealing the Patrol's existence to unauthorized people," said Everard. "We couldn't tell her the truth even if we wanted to . . . and I, for one, don't want to."

He looked at the girl. She stood breathing heavily, with a dawn in her eyes. The wind caressed her hair and the long thin dress.

She shook her head, as if clearing a mist of nightmare, and ran over to clasp their hands. "Forgive me, Manslach," she whispered. "I should have known you'd not betray us."

She kissed him and van Sarawak. The Venusian responded eagerly, but Everard couldn't bring himself to. He would have remembered Judas.

"Where are we?" she chattered. "It looks almost like Llangollen, but no men — Have you taken us to the Happy Isles?" She spun on one foot and danced among summer flowers. "Can we rest here a while before returning home?"

Everard drew a long breath. "I've bad news for you, Deirdre," he said.

She grew silent, and he saw her gather herself.

"We can't go back."

She waited mutely.

"The — the spells I had to use,

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to save our lives . . . I had no choice, but those spells debar us from returning home."

"There is no hope?" He could barely hear her.

Everard's eyes stung. "No," he said.

She turned and walked away. Van Sarawak moved to follow her, but thought better of it and sat down beside Everard. "What'd you tell her?" he asked.

Everard repeated his words. "It seemed the best compromise," he finished. "I can't send her back to — what's waiting for this world."

"No." Van Sarawak sat quiet for a while, staring across the sea. Then: "What year is this? About the time of Christ? Then we're still upstairs of the turning point."

"Yeh. And we still have to find out what it was."

"Let's go back to the farther past. Lots of Patrol offices. We can recruit help there."

"Maybe." Everard lay back in the grass and regarded the sky. Reaction overwhelmed him. "I think I can locate the key event right here, though, with Deirdre's help. Wake me up when she comes back."

She returned dry-eyed, a desolate calm over her. When Everard asked if she would assist in his own mission, she nodded. "Of course. My life is yours who saved it."

After getting you into that mess in the first place. Everard said carefully: "All I want from you is some information. Do you know about . . . about putting people to sleep, a sleep in which they may believe anything they're told?"

"Y-yes," she said doubtfully. "I've seen medical Druids do that."

"It won't harm you. I only wish to make you sleep so you can remember everything you know, things you believe forgotten. It won't take long."

Her trustfulness was hard to endure. Using Patrol techniques, Everard put her in a hypnotic state of total recall and dredged out all she had ever read or heard about the Second Punic War. That added up to enough for his purposes.

Roman interference with Carthaginian enterprise south of the Ebro, in direct violation of treaty, had been the last roweling. In 219 B.C. Hannibal Barca, governor of Carthaginian Spain, laid siege to Saguntum. After eight months he took it, and thus provoked his long-planned war with Rome. At the beginning of May, 218, he crossed the Pyrenees with 90,000 infantry, 12,000 cavalry, and 37 elephants, marched through Gaul, and went over the Alps. His losses en route were gruesome: only 20,000 foot and 6,000 horse reached Italy late in the year. Nevertheless, near the Ticinus River he met and broke a superior Roman force. In the course of the following year, he fought several bloodily victorious battles and advanced into Apulia and Campania.

The Apulians, Lucaninas, Brut-

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tians, and Samnites went over to his side. Quintus Fabius Maximus fought a grim guerrilla war, which laid Italy waste and decided nothing. But meanwhile Hasdrubal Barca was organizing Spain, and in 211 he arrived with reinforcements. In 210 Hannibal took and burned Rome, and in 207 the last cities of the confederacy surrendered to him.

"That's it," said Everard. He stroked the coppery hair of the girl lying beside him. "Go to sleep now. Sleep well and wake up glad of heart."

"What'd she tell you?" asked van Sarawak.

"A lot of detail," said Everard — the whole story had required more than an hour. "The important thing is this: her knowledge of history is good, but never mentions the Scipios."

"The who's?"

"Publius Cornelius Scipio commanded the Roman army at Ticinus, and was beaten there. But later he had the intelligence to turn westward and gnaw away the Carthaginian base in Spain. It ended with Hannibal being effectively cut off in Italy, and the Iberian help which could be sent was annihilated. Scipio's son of the same name also held a high command, and was the man who finally whipped Hannibal at Zama; that's Scipio Africanus the Elder.

"Father and son were by far the best leaders Rome had — but Deirdre never heard of them."

"So —" Van Sarawak stared eastward across the sea, where Gauls and Cimbri and Parthians were ramping through the shattered Classical world. "What happened to them in this time line?"

"My own total recall tells me that both the Scipios were at Ticinus, and very nearly killed; the son saved his father's life during the retreat, which I imagine was more like a stampede. One gets you ten that in *this* history the Scipios died there."

"Somebody must have knocked them off," said van Sarawak on a rising note. "Some time traveler . . . it could only have been that."

"Well, it seems probable, anyhow. We'll see." Everard looked away from Deirdre's slumbrous face. "We'll see."

At the Pleistocene resort — half an hour after having left it — the Patrolmen put the girl in charge of a sympathetic Greek-speaking matron and summoned their colleagues. Then the message capsules began jumping through space-time.

All offices prior to 218 B.C. — the closest was Alexandria, 250–230 — were "still" there, two hundred or so agents altogether. Written contact with the future was confirmed to be impossible, and a few short jaunts upstairs clinched the proof. A worried conference met at the Academy, back in the Oligocene Period. Unattached agents ranked those with steady assignments but

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not each other; on the basis of his own experience, Everard found himself the chairman of a committee of top-bracket officers.

It was a frustrating job. These men and women had leaped centuries and wielded the weapons of gods; but they were still human, with all the ingrained orneriness of their race.

Everyone agreed that the damage would have to be repaired. But there was fear for those agents who had gone ahead into time before being warned; if they weren't back when history was re-altered, they would never be seen again. Everard deputized parties to attempt rescue, but doubted there'd be much success; he warned them sternly to return in a day or face the consequences.

A man from the Scientific Renaissance had another point to make. Granted, it was the survivors' plain duty to restore the original time track. But they had a duty to knowledge as well. Here was a unique chance to study a whole new phase of humankind; there should be several years' anthropological work done before — Everard slapped him down with difficulty. There weren't so many Patrolmen left that they could take the risk.

Study groups had to determine the exact moment and circumstances of the change. The wrangling over methods went on interminably. Everard glared out the window, into the prehuman night, and wondered if the sabertooths weren't doing a better job after all than their simian successors.

When he had finally gotten his bands dispatched, he broke out a bottle and got drunk with van Sarawak.

Reconvening the next day, the steering committee heard from its deputies, who had run up a total of years in the future. A dozen Patrolmen had been rescued from more or less ignominious situations; another score would simply have to be written off. The spy group's report was more interesting. It seemed that there had been two Helvetian mercenaries who joined Hannibal in the Alps and won his confidence. After the war, they had risen to high positions in Carthage; under the names of Phrontes and Himilco, they had practically run the government, engineered Hannibal's murder, and set new records for luxurious living. One of the Patrolmen had seen their homes and the men themselves. "A lot of improvements that hadn't been thought of in Classical times. The fellows looked to me like Neldorians, 205th millennium."

Everard nodded. That was an age of bandits who had "already" given the Patrol a lot of work. "I think we've settled the matter," he said. "It makes no difference whether they were with Hannibal before Ticinus or not. We'd have hell's own time arresting them in the Alps without tipping our hand

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and changing the future ourselves. What counts is that they seem to have rubbed out the Scipios, and that's the point we'll have to strike at."

A Nineteenth-Century Britisher, competent but with elements of Colonel Blimp, unrolled a map and discoursed on his aerial observations of the battle. He'd used an infra-red telescope to look through low clouds. "And here the Romans stood —"

"I know," said Everard. "A thin red line. The moment when they took flight is the crucial one, but the confusion then also gives us our chance. Okay, we'll want to surround the battlefield unobtrusively, but I don't think we can get away with more than two agents actually on the scene. The Alexandria office can supply Van and me with costumes."

"I say," exclaimed the Englishman. "I thought I'd have the privilege."

"No. Sorry." Everard smiled with one corner of his mouth. "It's no privilege, anyway. Risk your neck, and all to wipe out a world of people like yourself."

"But dash it all —"

Everard rose. "I've got to go," he said flatly. "I don't know why, but I've got to."

Van Sarawak nodded.

They left their scooter in a clump of trees and started across the field.

Around the horizon and up in the sky waited a hundred armed Patrolmen, but that was small consolation here among spears and arrows. Lowering clouds hurried before a cold whistling wind, there was a spatter of rain, sunny Italy was enjoying its late fall.

The cuirass was heavy on Everard's shoulders as he trotted across blood-slippery mud. He had helmet, greaves, a Roman shield on his left arm and a sword at his waist; but his right hand gripped a stunner. Van Sarawak loped behind, similarly equipped, eyes shifting under the wind-ruffled officer's plume.

Trumpets howled and drums stuttered. It was all but lost among the yells of men and tramp of feet, screaming horses and whining arrows. The legion of Carthage was pressing in, hammering edged metal against the buckling Roman lines. Here and there the fight was already breaking up into small knots, where men cursed and cut at strangers.

The combat had passed over this area and swayed beyond. Death lay around him. Everard hurried behind the Roman force, toward the distant gleam of the eagles. Across helmets and corpses, he made out a banner that fluttered triumphant, vivid red and purple against the unrestful sky. And there, looming gray and monstrous, lifting their trunks and bellowing, came a squad of elephants.

He had seen war before. It was always the same — not a neat affair of lines across maps, nor a hallooing gallantry, but men who gasped and

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sweated and bled in bewilderment.

A slight, dark-faced youth squirmed nearby, trying feebly to pull out the javelin which had pierced his stomach. He was a cavalryman from Carthage, but the burly Italian peasant who sat next to him, staring without belief at the stump of an arm, paid no attention.

A flight of crows hovered overhead, riding the wind and waiting.

"This way," muttered Everard. "Hurry up, for God's sake! That line's going to break any minute."

The breath was raw in his throat as he panted toward the standards of the Republic. It came to him that he'd always rather wished Hannibal had won. There was something repellent about the cold, unimaginative greed of Rome. And here he was, trying to save the city. Well-a-day, life was often an odd business.

It was some consolation that Scipio Africanus was one of the few decent men left after the war.

Screaming and clangor lifted, and the Italians reeled back. Everard saw something like a wave smashed against a rock. But it was the rock which advanced, crying out and stabbing, stabbing.

He began to run. A legionary went past, howling his panic. A grizzled Roman veteran spat on the ground, braced his feet, and stood where he was till they cut him down. Hannibal's elephants squealed and lifted curving tusks. The ranks of Carthage held firm, advancing to the inhuman pulse of their drums. Cavalry skirmished on the wings in a toothpick flash of lances.

Up ahead, now! Everard saw men on horseback, Roman officers. They held the eagles aloft and shouted, but nobody could hear them above the din.

A small group of legionaries came past and halted. Their leader hailed the Patrolmen: "Over here! We'll give them a fight, by the belly of Venus!"

Everard shook his head and tried to go past. The Roman snarled and sprang at him. "Come here, you cowardly —" A stun beam cut off his words and he crashed into the muck. His men shuddered, someone screamed, and the party broke into flight.

The Carthaginians were very near, shield to shield and swords running red. Everard could see a scar livid on the cheek of one man, and the great hook nose of another. A hurled spear clanged off his helmet, he lowered his head and ran.

A combat loomed before him. He tried to go around, and tripped on a gashed corpse. A Roman stumbled over him in turn. Van Sarawak cursed and dragged him away. A sword furrowed the Venusian's arm.

Beyond, Scipio's men were surrounded and battling without hope. Everard halted, sucking air into starved lungs, and looked into the thin rain. Armor gleamed wetly, Roman horsemen galloping in with mud up to their mounts' noses —

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that must be the son, Scipio Africanus to be, hastening to his father. The hoofbeats were like thunder in the earth.

"Over there!"

Van Sarawak cried it out and pointed. Everard crouched where he was, rain dripping off his helmet and down his face. A small troop of Carthaginians was riding toward the battle around the eagles, and at their head were two men with the height and craggy features of Neldor. They were clad in the usual G.I. armor, but each of them held a slim-barreled gun.

"This way!" Everard spun on his heel and dashed toward them. The leather in his cuirass creaked as he ran.

They were close to the newcomers before they were seen. A Carthaginian face swung to them and called the warning. Everard saw how he grinned in his beard. One of the Neldorians scowled and aimed his blast-rifle.

Everard went on his stomach, and the vicious blue-white beam sizzled where he had been. He snapped a shot and one of the African horses went over in a roar of metal. Van Sarawak stood his ground and fired steadily. Two, three, four — and there went a Neldorian, down in the mud!

Men hewed at each other around the Scipios. The Neldorians' escort yelled with terror. They must have had the blasters demonstrated, but these invisible blows were something else. They bolted. The second of the bandits got his horse under control and turned to follow.

"Take care of the one you potted," gasped Everard. "Haul him off the battlefield — we'll want to question —" He himself scrambled to his feet and made for a riderless horse. He was in the saddle and after the remaining Neldorian before he was fully aware of it.

They fled through chaos. Everard urged speed from his mount, but was content to pursue. Once they'd got out of sight, a scooter could swoop down and make short work of his quarry.

The same thought must have occurred to the time rover. He reined in and took aim. Everard saw the blinding flash and felt his cheek sting with a near miss. He set his pistol to wide beam and rode in shooting.

Another fire-bolt took his horse full in the breast. The animal toppled and Everard went out of the saddle. Trained reflexes softened the fall, he bounced dizzily to his feet and staggered toward his enemy. His stunner was gone, no time to look for it. Never mind, it could be salvaged later, if he lived. The widened beam had found its mark; it wasn't strong enough to knock a man out, but the Neldorian had dropped his rifle and the horse stood swaying with closed eyes.

Rain beat in Everard's face. He slogged up to the mount. The Neldorian jumped to earth and

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drew a sword. Everard's own blade rasped forth.

"As you will," he said in Latin. "One of us will not leave this field."

The moon rose over mountains and turned the snow to a sudden wan glitter. Far in the north, a glacier threw back the light in broken shards, and a wolf howled. The Cro-Magnons chanted in their cave, it drifted faintly through to the veranda.

Deirdre stood in darkness, looking out. Moonlight dappled her face and caught a gleam of tears. She started as Everard and van Sarawak came up behind her.

"Are you back so soon?" she asked. "You only came here and left me this morning."

"It didn't take long," said van Sarawak. He had gotten a hypno in Attic Greek.

"I hope . . ." She tried to smile. "I hope you have finished your task and can rest from your labors."

"Yes," said Everard. "Yes, we finished it."

They stood side by side for a while, looking out on a world of winter.

"Is it true what you said, that I can never go home?" asked Deirdre.

"I'm afraid so. The spells —" Everard shrugged and swapped a glance with van Sarawak.

They had official permission to tell the girl as much as they wished and take her wherever they thought she could live best. Van Sarawak maintained that that would be Venus in his century, and Everard was too tired to argue.

Deirdre drew a long breath. "So be it," she said. "I'll not waste a life weeping for it . . . but the Baal grant that they have it well, my people at home."

"I'm sure they will," said Everard.

Suddenly he could do no more. He only wanted to sleep. Let van Sarawak say what had to be said, and reap whatever rewards there might be.

He nodded at his companion. "I'm turning in," he declared. "Carry on, Van."

The Venusian took the girl's arm. Everard went slowly back to his room.

For any readers victimized by a modern anti-classical education, I might insert this footnote: that Mr. Anderson's title stems, of course, from the political war-cry uttered by Marcus Porcius Cato ("Cato the Elder") in 157 B.C. *and incessantly for a decade thereafter:* Delenda est Carthago (Carthage must be destroyed), *resulting in as insensate an act of barbarism (what we today would call genocide) as any military victor has ever perpetrated — and yet an act which laid the foundations for the world in which we exist.* — A. B.

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Mellonta Tauta *is one of Poe's last stories (it appeared in* Godey's Lady's Book *for February, 1849, less than a year before his death) and also one of his least known — although it represents one of his very rare attempts at scientific extrapolation of the technological future. The title, from the* ANTIGONE *of Sophocles, is a phrase which Poe was fond of quoting and which he has translated elsewhere as* These things are in the future. *But peculiarly, Poe's vision of the future demands reprinting here, since it is omitted from almost all contemporary Poe collections, not for its prophetic qualities but for the startling inadequacy of its forecast. Here is the perfect illustration of Deming's Law (see* The Shape of Things That Came, *F&SF, October, 1951): that the accuracy of an extrapolation varies* inversely *as the square of the author's conservative adherence to probability, from which we deduce the corollary that it is impossible for a science fiction writer to extrapolate fast and far enough to keep up with factual progress. Poe had as alert, informed and imaginative a mind as American fiction could boast a century ago; yet when he chose to guess ahead for an entire millennium (no doubt, as he thought, rather daringly), his predictions were doomed to become wholly antiquated in a good deal less than a century; and now, 106 years after publication, his imagined world of 2848 seems as far in the technological past as his factual world of 1849. Dare we think that our own predictions will fare better? This is, for writers and readers alike, a most instructive story — and also, despite the failure of its prophecies, a wittily satiric one. [The current version has been somewhat shortened, chiefly by the omission of digressions whose topical satire is incomprehensible to today's reader.]*

Mellonta Tauta

by EDGAR ALLAN POE

On Board Balloon "SKYLARK."
April 1, 2848.

NOW, MY DEAR FRIEND — NOW, FOR your sins, you are to suffer the infliction of a long gossiping letter. I tell you distinctly that I am going to punish you for all your impertinences by being as tedious, as discursive, as incoherent, and as un-

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satisfactory as possible. Besides, here I am, cooped up in a dirty balloon, with some one or two hundred of the *canaille*, all bound on a *pleasure* excursion (what a funny idea some people have of pleasure!), and I have no prospect of touching *terra firma* for a month at least. Nobody to talk to. Nothing to do. When one has nothing to do, then is the time to correspond with one's friends. You perceive, then, why it is that I write you this letter — it is on account of my *ennui* and your sins.

Get ready your spectacles and make up your mind to be annoyed. I mean to write at you every day during this odious voyage.

Heigho! when will any *Invention* visit the human pericranium? Are we forever to be doomed to the thousand inconveniences of the balloon? Will *nobody* contrive a more expeditious mode of progress? The jog-trot movement, to my thinking, is little less than positive torture. Upon my word we have not made more than a hundred miles an hour since leaving home! The very birds beat us — at least some of them. I assure you that I do not exaggerate at all. Our motion, no doubt, seems slower than it actually is — this on account of our having no objects about us by which to estimate our velocity, and on account of our going with the wind. To be sure, whenever we meet a balloon we have a chance of perceiving our rate, and then, I admit, things do not appear so very bad. Accustomed as I am to this mode of travelling, I cannot get over a kind of giddiness whenever a balloon passes us in a current directly overhead. It always seems to me like an immense bird of prey about to pounce upon us and carry us off in its claws. One went over us this morning about sunrise, and so nearly overhead that its drag-rope actually brushed the net-work suspending our car, and caused us very serious apprehension. Our captain said that if the material of the bag had been the trumpery varnished "silk" of five hundred or a thousand years ago, we should inevitably have been damaged. This silk, as he explained it to me, was a fabric composed of the entrails of a species of earth-worm. Singular to relate, it was once much admired as an article of *female dress!*

Talking of drag-ropes — our own, it seems, has this moment knocked a man overboard from one of the small magnetic propellers that swarm in ocean below us — a boat of about six thousand tons, and, from all accounts, shamefully crowded. These diminutive barques should be prohibited from carrying more than a definite number of passengers. The man, of course, was not permitted to get on board again, and was soon out of sight, he and his life-preserver. I rejoice, my dear friend, that we live in an age so enlightened that no such thing as an individual is supposed to exist. It is the mass for which the true Humanity cares.

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April 2. — Spoke to-day the magnetic cutter in charge of the middle section of floating telegraph wires. I learn that when this species of telegraph was first put into operation by Horse, it was considered quite impossible to convey the wires over sea; but now we are at a loss to comprehend where the difficulty lay! So wags the world. *Tempora mutantur* — excuse me for quoting the Etruscan. What *would* we do without the Atalantic telegraph? (Pundit says Atlantic was the ancient adjective.) We lay to a few minutes to ask the cutter some questions, and learned, among other glorious news, that civil war is raging in Africa, while the plague is doing its good work beautifully both in Yurope and Ayesher. Is it not truly remarkable that, before the magnificent light shed upon philosophy by Humanity, the world was accustomed to regard War and Pestilence as calamities? Were they so blind as not to perceive that the destruction of a myriad of individuals is only so much positive advantage to the mass!

April 3. — It is really a very fine amusement to ascend the rope-ladder leading to the summit of the balloon-bag, and thence survey the surrounding world. From the car below you know the prospect is not so comprehensive — you can see little vertically. But seated here (where I write this) in the luxuriously cushioned open piazza of the summit, one can see everything that is going on in all directions. Just now there is quite a crowd of balloons in sight, and they represent a very animated appearance, while the air is resonant with the hum of so many millions of human voices. I have heard it asserted that when Yellow or (Pundit *will* have it) Violet, who is supposed to have been the first aeronaut, maintained the practicability of traversing the atmosphere in all directions, by merely ascending or descending until a favorable current was attained, he was scarcely hearkened to at all by his contemporaries, who looked upon him as merely an ingenious sort of madman, because the philosophers (!) of the day declared the thing impossible. Really now it does seem to me *quite* unaccountable how any thing so obviously feasible could have escaped the sagacity of the ancient *savants*. But in all ages the great obstacles to advancement in Art have been opposed by the so-called men of science.

April 4. — The new gas is doing wonders, in conjunction with the new improvement with gutta percha. How very safe, commodious, manageable, and in every respect convenient are our modern balloons! Here is an immense one approaching us at the rate of at least a hundred and fifty miles an hour. It seems to be crowded with people — perhaps there are three or four hundred passengers — and yet it soars to an elevation of nearly a mile, looking down upon poor us with sovereign

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contempt. Still a hundred or even two hundred miles an hour is slow travelling after all. *Do* you remember our flight on the railroad across the Kanadaw continent? — fully three hundred miles the hour — *that* was travelling. Nothing to be seen, though — nothing to be done but flirt, feast and dance in the magnificent saloons. Do you remember what an odd sensation was experienced when, by chance, we caught a glimpse of external objects while the cars were in full flight? Everything seemed unique — in one mass: For my part, I cannot say but that I preferred the travelling by the slow train of a hundred miles the hour. Here we were permitted to have glass windows — even to have them open — and something like a distinct view of the country was attainable. . . . Pundit says that *the route* for the great Kanadaw railroad must have been in some measure marked out about nine hundred years ago! In fact, he goes so far as to assert that actual traces of a road are still discernible — traces referable to a period quite as remote as that mentioned. The track, it appears, was *double* only; ours, you know, has twelve paths; and three or four new ones are in preparation. The ancient rails are very slight, and placed so close together as to be, according to modern notions, quite frivolous, if not dangerous in the extreme. The present width of track — fifty feet — is scarcely secure enough.

April 5. — I am almost devoured by *ennui.* Pundit is the only conversible person on board; and he, poor soul! can speak of nothing but antiquities. He has been occupied all the day in the attempt to convince me that the ancient Amriccans *governéd themselves!* — did ever anybody hear of such an absurdity? — that they existed in a sort of every man-for-himself confederacy, after the fashion of the "prairie dogs" that we read of in fable. He says that they started with the queerest idea conceivable, viz: that all men are born free and equal — this in the very teeth of the laws of *gradation* so visibly impressed upon all things both in the moral and physical universe. Every man "voted," as they called it — that is to say meddled with public affairs — until, at length, it was discovered that what is everybody's business is nobody's, and that the "Republic" (so the absurd thing was called) was without a government at all. It is related, however, that the first circumstance which disturbed, very particularly, the self-complacency of the philosophers who constructed this "Republic," was the startling discovery that universal suffrage gave opportunity for fraudulent schemes, by means of which any desired number of votes might at any time be polled, without the possibility of prevention or even detection, by any party which should be merely villainous enough not to be ashamed of the fraud. A

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little reflection upon this discovery sufficed to render evident the consequences, which were that rascality *must* predominate — in a word, that a republican government *could* never be any thing but a rascally one. While the philosophers, however, were busied in blushing at their stupidity in not having foreseen these inevitable evils, and intent upon the invention of new theories, the matter was put to an abrupt issue by a fellow of the name of *Mob*, who took every thing into his own hands and set up a despotism, in comparison with which those of the fabulous Zeros and Hellofagabaluses were respectable and delectable. This Mob (a foreigner, by-the-by), is said to have been the most odious of all men that ever encumbered the earth. He was a giant in stature — insolent, rapacious, filthy; had the gall of a bullock with the heart of a hyena and the brains of a peacock. He died, at length, by dint of his own energies, which exhausted him. Nevertheless, he had his uses, as every thing has, however vile, and taught mankind a lesson which to this day it is in no danger of forgetting — never to run directly contrary to the natural analogies. As for Republicanism, no analogy could be found for it upon the face of the earth — unless we except the case of the "prairie dogs," an exception which seems to demonstrate, if any thing, that democracy is a very admirable form of government — for dogs.

April 6. — Last night had a fine view of Alpha Lyræ, whose disk, through our captain's spy-glass, subtends an angle of half a degree, looking very much as our sun does to the naked eye on a misty day. Alpha Lyræ, although so *very* much larger than our sun, by-the-by, resembles him closely as regards its spots, its atmosphere, and in many other particulars. It is only within the last century, Pundit tells me, that the binary relation existing between these two orbs began even to be suspected. The evident motion of our system in the heavens was (strange to say!) referred to an orbit about a prodigious star in the centre of the galaxy.

April 7. — Continued last night our astronomical amusements. Had a fine view of the five Neptunian asteroids, and watched with much interest the putting up of a huge impost on a couple of lintels in the new temple at Daphnis in the moon. It was amusing to think that creatures so diminutive as the lunarians, and bearing so little resemblance to humanity, yet evinced a mechanical ingenuity so much superior to our own. One finds it difficult, too, to conceive the vast masses which these people handle so easily, to be as light as our own reason tell us they actually are.

April 8. — Eureka! Pundit is in his glory. A balloon from Kanadaw spoke us to-day and threw on board several late papers; they contain some exceedingly curious informa-

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tion relative to Kanawdian or rather Amriccan antiquities. You know, I presume, that laborers have for some months been employed in preparing the ground for a new fountain at Paradise, the Emperor's principal pleasure garden. Paradise, it appears, has been, *literally* speaking, an island time out of mind — that is to say, its northern boundary was always (as far back as any record extends) a rivulet, or rather a very narrow arm of the sea. This arm was gradually widened until it attained its present breadth — a mile. The whole length of the island is nine miles; the breadth varies materially. The entire area (so Pundit says) was, about eight hundred years ago, densely packed with houses, some of them twenty stories high: land (for some most unaccountable reason) being considered as especially precious just in this vicinity. The disastrous earthquake, however, of the year 2050, so totally uprooted and overwhelmed the town (for it was almost too large to be called a village) that the most indefatigable of our antiquarians have never yet been able to obtain from the site any sufficient data (in the shape of coins, medals or inscriptions) wherewith to build up even the ghost of a theory concerning the manners, customs, etc., etc., etc., of the aboriginal inhabitants. Nearly all that we have hitherto known of them is, that they were a portion of the Knickerbocker tribe of savages infesting the continent at its first discovery by Recorder Riker, a knight of the Golden Fleece. They were by no means uncivilized, however, but cultivated various arts and even sciences after a fashion of their own. It is related of them that they were acute in many respects, but were oddly afflicted with monomania for building what, in the ancient Amriccan, was denominated "churches" — a kind of pagoda instituted for the worship of two idols that went by the names of Wealth and Fashion. In the end, it is said, the island became, nine tenths of it, church. The women, too, it appears, were oddly deformed by a natural protuberance of the region just below the small of the back — although, most unaccountably, this deformity was looked upon altogether in the light of a beauty.

Well, these few details are nearly all that have descended to us respecting the ancient Knickerbockers. It seems, however, that while digging in the centre of the emperor's garden (which, you know, covers the whole island), some of the workmen unearthed a cubical and evidently chiseled block of granite, weighing several hundred pounds. It was in good preservation, having received, apparently, little injury from the convulsion which entombed it. On one of its surfaces was a marble slab with (only think of it!) *an inscription — a legible inscription.* Pundit is in ecstasies. Upon detaching the slab, a cavity appeared, containing a leaden box filled

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with various coins, a long scroll of names, several documents which appear to resemble newspapers, with other matters of intense interest to the antiquarian! There can be no doubt that all these are genuine Amriccan relics belonging to the tribe called Knickerbocker. The papers thrown on board, our balloon are filled with fac-similes of the coins, MSS., typography, etc., etc. I copy for your amusement the Knickerbocker inscription on the marble slab: —

THIS CORNER STONE OF A MONUMENT TO THE MEMORY OF
GEORGE WASHINGTON,
WAS LAID WITH APPROPRIATE CEREMONIES ON THE 19TH DAY OF OCTOBER, 1847,
THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE SURRENDER OF LORD CORNWALLIS
TO GENERAL WASHINGTON AT YORKTOWN, A. D. 1781,
UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT ASSOCIATION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK.

This, as I give it, is a verbatim translation done by Pundit himself, so there *can* be no mistake about it. From the few words thus preserved, we glean several important items of knowledge, not the least interesting of which is the fact that a thousand years ago *actual* monuments had fallen into disuse — as was all very proper — the people contenting themselves, as we do now, with a mere indication of the design to erect a monument at some future time; a cornerstone being cautiously laid by itself "solitary and alone" (excuse me for quoting the great Amriccan poet Benton!), as a guarantee of the magnanimous *intention*. We ascertain, too, very distinctly, from this admirable inscription, the how as well as the where and the what, of the great surrender in question. As to the *where*, it was Yorktown (wherever that was), and as to the *what*, it was Lord Cornwallis (no doubt some wealthy dealer in corn). *He* was surrendered. The only question is what could the savages wish him surrendered for. But when we remember that these savages were undoubtedly cannibals, we are led to the conclusion that they intended him for sausage. As to the *how* of the surrender, no language can be more explicit. Lord Cornwallis was surrendered (for

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sausage) "under the auspices of the Washington Monument Association" — no doubt a charitable institution for the depositing of corner-stones. — But, Heaven bless me! what is the matter? Ah, I see — the balloon has collapsed, and we shall have a tumble into the sea. I have, therefore, only time enough to add that, from a hasty inspection of the fac-similes of newspapers, etc., etc., I find that *the* great men in those days among the Amriccans, were one John, a smith, and one Zacchary, a tailor.

Good-bye, until I see you again. Whether you ever get this letter or not is point of little importance, as I write altogether for my own amusement. I shall cork the MS. up in a bottle, however, and throw it into the sea.

Yours everlastingly,
PUNDITA.

Coming Next Month

C. M. Kornbluth, high on the list of modern masters of science fiction, has appeared in F&SF too infrequently, but always with a memorable classic. If you vividly recall *The Silly Season*, *The Goodly Creatures* and *I Never Ast No Favors*, you won't be disappointed in *The Cosmic Charge Account*, the satiric, pointed and exciting Kornbluth novelet which leads off our next issue (on the stands in early December). In honor of the season, there'll be a special story for Christmas by Manly Wade Wellman and one for New Year's Day by Robert Abernathy, plus stories by Arthur C. Clarke, Mildred Clingerman (possibly her best yet!) and P. Schuyler Miller, the promised fictional follow-up to Dr. Richardson's speculations on Martian sexual mores (see p. 52), and Dr. Robert Lindner's celebrated and extraordinary non-fiction case-history, *The Jet Propelled Couch*, the true psychoanalytical tale of an atomic scientist who believed himself capable of transcending space and time in remote transgalactic adventures.

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On April 25, 1955, the USSR announced that its scientists were at work on plans for a space station, and on July 29 the United States revealed its project for MOUSEs (Minimal Orbital Unmanned Satellites of Earth) — all of which came as no surprise to science fiction readers who have carefully noted the occasional security slips during the past decade. It's a good time now for those readers to switch their minds off of hypergalactic subspatial overdrive and return to the immediacies of practical space travel, the ABC's that we can so easily forget while contemplating the x^n's. Dr. Robert S. Richardson of Mount Wilson Observatory, well known to s. f. enthusiasts for his many articles in Astounding *and his fiction under the pseudonym of Philip Latham, here presents — in an article originally commissioned by the* Saturday Review *and now expanded for F&SF — an admirable brief refresher course on the probable first steps of interplanetary travel, which leads, with deceptive simplicity, to certain highly provocative new conclusions.*

The Day After We Land on Mars

by ROBERT S. RICHARDSON

MARS IS THE ONLY BODY ASIDE from the Earth itself on which we have been able to detect evidence of life. The stars and nebulae present us with problems which in many respects make them more interesting objects for study than Mars, particularly in nuclear physics and related fields. A special interest attaches to Mars, however, owing to the fact that it may be the abode of life. There may be myriads of other stars besides our sun with planets revolving around them on which life has developed. We do not know. At present it seems unlikely that we will ever know. So far as life in the universe is concerned we are alone with Mars.

Doubtless men have always dreamed of traveling to far off worlds more wonderful and (presumably) happier than their own. Until very recently the idea of travel beyond the Earth has hardly been more than a vague dream. Indeed few ever contended it could be anything else. Now suddenly the spectacular advances in rocketry and electronics have made space travel a possibility

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within our lifetime — within the next ten years, according to some. The prospect that unfolds before us is dazzling. The opportunities for discovery seem unlimited. And our enthusiasm for exploration in space unbounded.

In the excitement of the hunt we have paid little attention to the object of the chase. We have not bothered to question if the game is worth the candle. Or whether colonization of another world might lead to repercussions of a highly disturbing character. If we succeed in reaching Mars the total cost will run into the billions. It will be the biggest real-estate deal in history. What can we expect for our money? What kind of a world is Mars?

In appearance, at least, Mars is not so different from the Earth. Many regions of the Earth must resemble Mars so closely that you could not tell which was which from a photograph. An artist friend of mine who has made a name for himself depicting planetary scenes tells me that Mars is his hardest subject. Editors balk at paying for a picture supposedly representing Mars when their readers are likely to mistake it for the country around Reno or Las Vegas. For Mars is practically all dry land and most of that land is desert. Mars is often referred to as a small planet, and it is true that its diameter is only about half that of the Earth's. But we must remember that three-quarters of the Earth is covered by water and uninhabitable. When we compare the two globes on a dry-land basis Mars is almost exactly the same size as the Earth.

On the Earth we immediately associate the word "desert" with "heat." On Mars, however, the situation is reversed. Over most of the planet the climate is similar to that of a cold high-altitude desert, such as the plateau of Tibet. Since Mars on the average is fifty million miles farther from the sun than the Earth we would naturally expect it to be considerably colder there, and actual measures with sensitive heat-detecting instruments confirm this. At noon in the tropics the average temperature is about 40° F. The atmosphere is so thin and dry that it has very little blanketing effect. Thus, the highest temperature comes near noon instead of about three o'clock in the afternoon as on the Earth. The temperature falls rapidly until at sunset it is 10° F. Since the unilluminated side of Mars is never turned directly toward the Earth we cannot measure the temperature at midnight, but it must be very low, say — 20° F. A temperature of — 90° F has been measured at the poles, and during the long polar night it may drop to — 150° F. On the other hand, a temperature as high as 85° F was once recorded at a dark spot near the equator when Mars was close to the sun. For comparison, the highest and lowest temperatures ever recorded on Earth are 136° F in Tripoli and — 90° F in Siberia.

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Mars undoubtedly has a thin atmosphere of some kind as the familiar markings on the disc are often obscured by haze and clouds. On photographs taken in blue light which show only the outer atmospheric shell of the planet bright clouds often appear on the late afternoon side. In 1954 such a cloud formation was observed several times which bore a startling resemblance to the letter "W." The effect was the same as if someone had scrawled the letter on the side of the disc with a piece of chalk. (This is one of those "now it can be told" items. If astronomers had released this information last year when Mars was closest there is no telling what the result might have been. Of course, if you turn the planet upside down the marking becomes an "M.")

Unfortunately, our knowledge of the constitution of the Martian atmosphere is mostly negative in character. We can only talk about what the atmosphere is *not*. For example, we know that it does *not* contain any oxygen; or, at most, less than 1 per cent of the amount in our atmosphere. The announcement in 1933 that observations taken with the 100-inch telescope on Mount Wilson had failed to detect oxygen in the atmosphere of Mars came as a blow to those who would like to have the planets inhabited by intelligent beings. Since oxygen is essential to all but the lowest forms of life it seems improbable that we will ever be destroyed by invaders from Mars. At present our best guess is that the atmosphere of Mars is made up of inert gases like those in our own atmosphere, but without oxygen.

Water also is an exceedingly scarce article on Mars. Astronomers took about 75 years to establish the fact that oxygen is absent, but the evidence for water can be obtained almost at a glance. Among the easiest markings to discern on the disc are the white caps at the poles, which expand in winter and shrink with the approach of spring. The most natural explanation is that they consist of a thin deposit of frost and snow. For a while it was thought they might be frozen carbon dioxide or dry ice, but this idea has been abandoned. (The polar caps are too warm!) This deposit of snow at the poles appears to be the only source of water on the entire planet. To us it would seem pitifully inadequate. Long ago Professor H. N. Russell of Princeton illustrated the perpetual drought that prevails on Mars in a striking way when he remarked that all the water on the planet would hardly fill Lake Huron, a statement that has been repeated by practically every author who has written on Mars in the last thirty years.

Although it is hard to make out a case for animal life on Mars, the evidence for plant life is good. There are still a few dissenters, but I believe that most astronomers today are willing to admit the existence of plant life. The distinctive red color of Mars comes from the barren

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deserts in the northern hemisphere. But the southern hemisphere up to about latitude 40° is girdled by dark green areas called *maria*. As the name indicates, these areas were once thought to be actual seas, and not so long ago either. It seems incredible today that our grandfathers could have been so wrong. The *maria* show seasonal changes which suggest the growth and decay of vegetation. In winter they are dim and gray or brownish in tint. But as spring comes on and the polar cap begins to melt a "wave of quickening" proceeds toward the equator and the *maria* grow darker and turn to green. It seems almost certain that the *maria* must undergo regeneration each year, as otherwise they would have been obliterated after millions of years by the dust from the deserts.

The chief objection to the vegetation hypothesis is the absence of oxygen and the limited supply of water. Also, the sub-zero cold would rule out most types of plants. It is possible, however, that such extremely hardy plants as the lichens might be able to survive on Mars, as their adaptability seems virtually unlimited. This does not mean that there are lichens growing on Mars. If the green *maria* consist of vegetation it is probably of a different type from ours.

II

Let us look ahead to a time when space travel has become a reality. The journey to Mars is still hazardous and beset with difficulties, but it is no longer a major problem. However, the length of the trip is hard to specify at present; there are many uncertainties involved. One plan which has been worked out in detail puts the round trip at nearly three years. This includes a stay on Mars of 449 days. Even making liberal allowances for technical advances it appears that the time spent on the road will always be considerable. (Unless, of course, atomic fuel becomes available.)

By a stupendous effort a station of several hundred young unmarried men has finally been established on Mars. Needless to say, the personnel was selected with the utmost care to eliminate those with physical defects and undesirable personality traits. Transporting men from the Earth to Mars and back is an exceedingly expensive and difficult proposition. For this reason the men cannot be rotated as rapidly as is desirable. A man who volunteers for Mars must do so with the expectation of remaining a minimum of, say, five years on the planet.

To ensure a permanent supply of water the station should be located at one of the poles. We will put it at the north pole since this one has never been observed to disappear completely in summer. A steady water supply would also solve the oxygen problem, since oxygen could probably be obtained most easily on Mars by decomposing water into

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hydrogen and oxygen. Locating the station at the pole has the disadvantage of a long night with its frightfully low temperature. But it is going to be cold wherever you build on Mars. And it is doubtful if the men would be much less miserable at the equator.

If we are able to get to Mars in the first place we should be able to build dwellings where the men can live in reasonable comfort so far as their bodily needs are concerned. But it would be an unnatural artificial existence, as restricted as taking up residence in a submarine. One could never step outdoors without suitable oxygen equipment. Since the atmospheric pressure is probably from 10 to 20 per cent of that at the surface of the Earth an airtight spacesuit would not be necessary. But even short trips would be dangerous owing to accidents to the oxygen equipment, and the chance of being caught outdoors at night without ample protection against the cold. Exploring parties could probably make field trips by airplane despite the low density of the air, since gravity is only 37 per cent of that on the Earth.

Only a few of the men would work outdoors. Most of the men's time would be spent inside the walls of the station. The work would be of a monotonous character, analyzing and classifying data secured on field trips, writing up reports, and transmitting the results to Earth. A man would never be alone. Every hour would be closely restricted and regulated. The discipline could never be relaxed; the least slip might result in disaster. A man would lead a precarious life, but it would lack the stimulation that comes from exposure to imminent danger. It would be an endless war without a truce or a victory.

III

Why should we risk lives and spend billions of dollars to reach such a desolate world when there are vast regions so much closer home that are still blank spots on the map? Because we will find new elements or precious mineral deposits? Impossible. Because occupation of the planets will be useful for military purposes? Nonsense. Because we will find a type of intelligence far greater than our own? The odds are overwhelmingly against it. Yet I feel confident in my own mind that if we attain the technical ability to travel to the planets we will do it. Furthermore, we will do it knowing perfectly well what to expect in advance.

Why?

Well . . . for no better reason than man's insatiable and restless curiosity to see what lies beyond his horizon. Because there will never be any peace for us until that challenging gap between the Earth and Mars is bridged. We should quit trying to think up logical, sensible reasons for space travel. *There are no such*

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reasons. If we ever reach Mars it will be because we were lured there by that same vague but irresistible urge that led men to make one assault after another on Mt. Everest: "Because it's there."

In my opinion, the only valid reason for journeying to Mars is pure scientific investigation. There is no question that a station on Mars would add to our store of basic scientific knowledge. For instance, we would like very much to know about magnetic conditions on Mars, or any planet for that matter. What is the strength of the magnetic field? How does it vary over the surface and throughout the day and year? There are many other problems that would be crying for study. The difficulty would be in trying to decide which ones to do first. Whether the taxpayers would be willing to foot a bill of $10,000,000,000 to learn that the magnetic axis of Mars is inclined seven degrees to its axis of rotation is a question. My hunch is they would not care particularly. Going to Mars would be a lot of fun and excitement, a trip in which we could all vicariously participate. Go ahead and spend the money.

The biologist would seem to have the biggest stake in such a trip. If the *maria* consist of vegetation he would be in much the same situation as Galileo with his first telescope — wherever he looked he would be sure to make an important discovery. Imagine the delight of a biologist able to study plant life that had originated under extraterrestrial conditions. Biologists like to think of plant succession, photosynthesis, and natural selection as fundamental principles of life. But the fact remains that they have been studied only under the conditions that prevail on the Earth, and their universal nature can only be inferred. It would be a most striking piece of evidence if such fundamental principles were also found to hold true on Mars.

IV

The nearest approximation we have to an outpost such as we have visualized on Mars is the 5,000-man base which the United States Government has established at Thule, Greenland. Apparently it is well equipped so that the men suffer no severe hardship. Yet all reports tell of the boredom and monotony of the life, of the conflicts arising from close contact with the same individuals day after day, as well as a profound sense of depression that comes from existence under such isolated and unnatural conditions.

But how much more intense would these sensations be to a man confined on Mars! Regardless of how carefully the men were screened beforehand, one wonders if any group of individuals could live for long amid such alien surroundings without tensions building up until they became intolerable. The sense of isolation would be overwhelming in

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its intensity. The thought that they are the *only* human beings in an entire world might drive men crazy. Worse still would be the utter futility of escape from such surroundings. At Thule the mere knowledge that civilization is always only a few days away by airplane must be comforting even if one is unable to make the trip. But on Mars civilization would be millions of miles distant in space and years away in time. A man could not even stroll outdoors to seek solace in the bosom of nature without first having to don his oxygen equipment, check with the gatekeeper, etc.

In all the articles on space travel which I have read there is one aspect of the subject which has never been discussed or so much as even mentioned. Yet it is a problem that is certain to arise, especially if the planets are going to be inhabited mainly by normal, healthy young men. It strikes me that if we are going to talk about traveling to the planets on a realistic adult level at all we should take the problems out in the open and face them. There is sex.

Judging from what has been written so far for TV scripts men in space are not supposed to have women on their minds. It seems doubtful, however, if men on Mars will be so preoccupied with measuring the horizontal component of the planet's magnetic field, or in setting off artificial earthquakes, that they can be completely oblivious of their bodies. Although examples can be cited where men have lived together alone for long periods, few would contend that such an existence is normal or healthy. I am not a psychiatrist, and hence cannot speak on such matters with authority. But one hardly needs to be an expert to know that men and women were meant to live together, and that when compelled to live alone they undergo personality changes of an undesirable nature. Tensions would develop until they became explosive. Eventually a man would have to find some way to relax — to cut loose — to do something about the impulses and ideas that have been building up inside of him. The situation would not be so serious if the men could be rotated fairly rapidly, but space travel by its very nature makes this impossible.

If space travel and colonization of the planets eventually become possible on a fairly large scale, it seems probable that we may be forced into first tolerating and finally openly accepting an attitude toward sex that is taboo in our present social framework. Can we expect men to work efficiently on Mars for five years without women? Family life would be impossible under the conditions that prevail. Imagine the result of allowing a few wives to set up housekeeping in the colony! After a few weeks the place would be a shambles. To put it bluntly, may it not be necessary for the success of the project to send some nice girls

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to Mars at regular intervals to relieve tensions and promote morale?

We may ask further if men (and women) who travel to other worlds will not eventually develop moral attitudes quite at variance with those generally accepted at present? Our moral attitudes and religious customs are the product of thousands of years of life upon the Earth. They developed out of conditions that prevail upon one planet. Is it not conceivable that in an entirely alien environment survival will produce among other things a sexual culture — shocking on Earth — which would be entirely "moral" judged by extraterrestrial standards?

V

[*What you have just read, Dr. Richardson wrote in April, 1955, and published in the* Saturday Review *for May 28. On July 30 he added the following comments especially for* F&SF.]

THE PRECEDING ARTICLE WAS WRITTEN some four months before the government announced its Earth-Satellite program. There is still a considerable gap between sending a body the size of a basketball around the Earth and launching a manned rocket for Mars. Nevertheless, the planets today seem definitely nearer. As a result, some of the ideas advanced in the article, especially those at the end dealing with certain problems of a sexual nature that may arise in the future, are now perhaps of more than abstract interest. I have therefore taken the liberty of adding a few remarks clarifying my attitude on this subject.

If we eventually succeed in reaching Mars and establishing a base there, it will be the supreme technical achievement of all time. Yet we may establish a base only to see it destroyed. By super-intelligent Martians? Not at all. We have a much more dangerous foe than any creatures likely to be lurking on Mars. *Ourselves.*

We have emphasized that men will be forced to live on Mars for probably several years in a state of isolation that is dreadful to contemplate. But if this greatest project of all time is to succeed, the men who run it must do more than merely exist on the planet. They must work together efficiently and harmoniously. The question is: can they do so under such prolonged unnatural conditions? Unless we are very careful our Martian base is going to look more like a scene from *White Cargo* or *Mister Roberts* than a smoothly operating scientific laboratory.

Probably the greatest threat to the success of the interplanetary project will be the gnawing absence of the opposite sex. Under such conditions psychiatrists tell us that men (and women) are likely to resort to some substitute such as homosexualism and autoeroticism.

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Some people have practically as good as told me that perhaps this will be the solution. Perhaps it will. But to me it represents a most unsatisfactory solution.

My feeling is that space travel may force us to adopt a more realistic attitude toward sex than that which prevails at present. I feel that the men stationed on a planet should be openly accompanied by women to relieve the sexual tensions that develop among healthy normal males. These women would be of the type which we are accustomed to call "nice girls." They would be nice girls *before* they went to live on Mars. They would be nice girls *while* they lived on Mars. And they would still be nice girls *after* they had lived on Mars.

Many will be outraged at the mention of such an idea. They will object that it is shockingly immoral. But it is "immoral" only when viewed from the standpoint of our present social reference system. Transform to another system of coordinates and it becomes entirely proper. For example, it would be regarded as practically unstupendous by a people such as the Masai who live in the Kenya colony of East Africa.

After passing their boyhood the Masai young men go to a kraal or encampment where they live for about ten years learning the arts of warfare. During this time they are not permitted to marry.

But this does not mean that they remain without women. Young unmarried girls also live in the kraal to serve as the warriors' sweethearts and sexual partners, a relationship which is openly approved in the Masai society. Every normal Masai girl has this experience in her youth. Should a girl become pregnant she returns to the village to be married. Having a child out of wedlock stigmatizes neither the girl nor the child. On the contrary, it aids a girl in securing a husband, for the Masai welcome children and regard barrenness as a principal cause of divorce. These matings are transitory and solely for sexual relief.

Perhaps in the conquest of space knowledge learned from primitive people may prove as helpful as the most advanced scientific thought.

In literature, as in science, ideas are apt to occur quite independently to different discoverers. Some months before Dr. Richardson's article first appeared, Paul Carter had finished the first draft of a short novelet exploring in fiction the very conclusions which the astronomer suggests. Our next (January) issue will feature this Carter story; if you remember Mr. Carter's astute time travel episode, Ounce of Prevention *(F&SF, Summer, 1950), you'll be prepared for the logic and insight with which he writes what is possibly the first honest fictional study of human sexual mores on another planet.*

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Forsaking robotics, deduction, spaceflight and all of his other specialties, Isaac Asimov tells a simple, direct, touching story of popular entertainment (and art) in the future.

Dreaming Is a Private Thing

by ISAAC ASIMOV

JESSE WEILL LOOKED UP FROM HIS desk. His old spare body, his sharp high-bridged nose, deep-set shadowy eyes and amazing shock of white hair had trademarked his appearance during the years that Dreams, Inc. had become world-famous.

He said, "Is the boy here already, Joe?"

Joe Dooley was short and heavy-set. A cigar caressed his moist lower lip. He took it away for a moment and nodded. "His folks are with him. They're all scared."

"You're sure this is not a false alarm, Joe? I haven't got much time." He looked at his watch. "Government business at two."

"This is a sure thing, Mr. Weill." Dooley's face was a study in earnestness. His jowls quivered with persuasive intensity. "Like I told you, I picked him up playing some kind of basketball game in the schoolyard. You should've seen the kid. He stunk. When he had his hands on the ball, his own team had to take it away, and fast, but just the same he had all the stance of a star player. Know what I mean? To me it was a giveaway."

"Did you talk to him?"

"Well, sure. I stopped him at lunch. You know me." Dooley gestured expansively with his cigar and caught the severed ash with his other hand. " 'Kid,' I said —"

"And he's dream material?"

"I said, 'Kid, I just came from Africa and —' "

"All right." Weill held up the palm of his hand. "Your word I'll always take. How you do it I don't know, but when you say a boy is a potential dreamer, I'll gamble. Bring him in."

The youngster came in between his parents. Dooley pushed chairs forward and Weill rose to shake hands. He smiled at the youngster in a way that turned the wrinkles of his face into benevolent creases.

"You're Tommy Slutsky?"

Tommy nodded wordlessly. He was about ten and a little small for that. His dark hair was plastered

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down unconvincingly and his face was unrealistically clean.

Weill said, "You're a good boy?"

The boy's mother smiled at once and patted Tommy's head maternally (a gesture which did not soften the anxious expression on the youngster's face). She said, "He's always a very good boy."

Weill let this dubious statement pass. "Tell me, Tommy," he said, and held out a lollipop which was first hesitantly considered, then accepted. "Do you ever listen to dreamies?"

"Sometimes," said Tommy, in an uncertain treble.

Mr. Slutsky cleared his throat. He was broad-shouldered and thick-fingered, the type of laboring man who, every once in a while, to the confusion of eugenics, sired a dreamer. "We rented one or two for the boy. Real old ones."

Weill nodded. He said, "Did you like them, Tommy?"

"They were sort of silly."

"You think up better ones for yourself, do you?"

The grin that spread over the ten-year-old features had the effect of taking away some of the unreality of the slicked hair and washed face.

Weill went on, gently, "Would you like to make up a dream for me?"

Tommy was instantly embarrassed. "I guess not."

"It won't be hard. It's very easy. — Joe."

Dooley moved a screen out of the way and rolled forward a dream-recorder.

The youngster looked owlishly at it.

Weill lifted the helmet and brought it close to the boy. "Do you know what this is?"

Tommy shrank away. "No."

"It's a thinker. That's what we call it because people think into it. You put it on your head and think anything you want."

"Then what happens?"

"Nothing at all. It feels nice."

"No," said Tommy, "I guess I'd rather not."

His mother bent hurriedly toward him. "It won't hurt, Tommy. You do what the man says." There was an unmistakable edge to her voice.

Tommy stiffened and looked as though he might cry, but he didn't. Weill put the thinker on him.

He did it gently and slowly and let it remain there for some 30 seconds before speaking again, to let the boy assure himself it would do no harm, to let him get used to the insinuating touch of the fibrils against the sutures of his skull (penetrating the skin so finely as to be almost insensible), and finally to let him get used to the faint hum of the alternating field vortices.

Then he said, "Now would you think for us?"

"About what?" Only the boy's nose and mouth showed.

"About anything you want. What's the best thing you would

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like to do when school is out?"

The boy thought a moment and said, with rising inflection, "Go on a stratojet?"

"Why not? Sure thing. You go on a jet. It's taking off right now." He gestured lightly to Dooley, who threw the freezer into circuit.

Weill kept the boy only five minutes and then let him and his mother be escorted from the office by Dooley. Tommy looked bewildered but undamaged by the ordeal.

Weill said to the father, "Now, Mr. Slutsky, if your boy does well on this test, we'll be glad to pay you five hundred dollars each year until he finishes high school. In that time, all we'll ask is that he spend an hour a week some afternoon at our special school."

"Do I have to sign a paper?" Slutsky's voice was a bit hoarse.

"Certainly. This is business, Mr. Slutsky."

"Well, I don't know. Dreamers are hard to come by, I hear."

"They are. They are. But your son, Mr. Slutsky, is not a dreamer yet. He might never be. Five hundred dollars a year is a gamble for us. It's not a gamble for you. When he's finished high school, it may turn out he's not a dreamer, yet you've lost nothing. You've gained maybe four thousand dollars altogether. If he *is* a dreamer, he'll make a nice living and you certainly haven't lost then."

"He'll need special training, won't he?"

"Oh, yes, most intensive. But we don't have to worry about that till after he's finished high school. Then, after two years with us, he'll be developed. Rely on me, Mr. Slutsky."

"Will you guarantee that special training?"

Weill, who had been shoving a paper across the desk at Slutsky, and punching a pen wrong-side-to at him, put the pen down and chuckled, "Guarantee? No. How can we when we don't know for sure yet if he's a real talent? Still, the five hundred a year will stay yours."

Slutsky pondered and shook his head. "I tell you straight out, Mr. Weill — After your man arranged to have us come here, I called Luster-Think. They said they'll guarantee training."

Weill sighed. "Mr. Slutsky, I don't like to talk against a competitor. If they say they'll guarantee training, they'll do as they say, but they can't make a boy a dreamer if he hasn't got it in him, training or not. If they take a plain boy without the proper talent and put him through a development course, they'll ruin him. A dreamer he won't be, that I guarantee you. And a normal human being he won't be, either. Don't take the chance of doing it to your son.

"Now Dreams, Inc. will be perfectly honest with you. If he can be a dreamer, we'll make him one. If not, we'll give him back to you

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without having tampered with him and say, 'Let him learn a trade.' He'll be better and healthier that way. I tell you, Mr. Slutsky — I have sons and daughters and grandchildren so I know what I say — I would not allow a child of mine to be pushed into dreaming if he's not ready for it. Not for a million dollars."

Slutsky wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and reached for the pen. "What does this say?"

"This is just an option. We pay you a hundred dollars in cash right now. No strings attached. We'll study the boy's reverie. If we feel it's worth following up, we'll call you in again and make the five hundred dollar a year deal. Leave yourself in my hands, Mr. Slutsky, and don't worry. You won't be sorry."

Slutsky signed.

Weill passed the document through the file slot and handed an envelope to Slutsky.

Five minutes later, alone in the office, he placed the unfreezer over his own head and absorbed the boy's reverie intently. It was a typically childish daydream. First Person was at the controls of the plane, which looked like a compound of illustrations out of the filmed thrillers that still circulated among those who lacked the time, desire or money for dream-cylinders.

When he removed the unfreezer, he found Dooley looking at him.

"Well, Mr. Weill, what do you think?" said Dooley, with an eager and proprietary air.

"Could be, Joe. Could be. He has the overtones and for a ten-year-old boy without a scrap of training it's hopeful. When the plane went through a cloud, there was a distinct sensation of pillows. Also the smell of clean sheets, which was an amusing touch. We can go with him a ways, Joe."

"Good." Joe beamed happily at Weill's approval.

"But I tell you, Joe, what we really need is to catch them still sooner. And why not? Some day, Joe, every child will be tested at birth. A difference in the brain there positively must be and it should be found. Then we could separate the dreamers at the very beginning."

"Hell, Mr. Weill," said Dooley, looking hurt. "What would happen to my job then?"

Weill laughed. "No cause to worry yet, Joe. It won't happen in our lifetimes. In mine, certainly not. We'll be depending on good talent scouts like you for many years. You just watch the playgrounds and the streets" — Weill's gnarled hand dropped to Dooley's shoulder with a gentle, approving pressure — "and find us a few more Hillarys and Janows and Luster-Think won't ever catch us. — Now get out. I want lunch and then I'll be ready for my 2 o'clock appointment. The government, Joe, the government." And he winked portentously.

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Jesse Weill's 2 o'clock appointment was with a young man, apple-cheeked, spectacled, sandy-haired and glowing with the intensity of a man with a mission. He presented his credentials across Weill's desk and revealed himself to be John J. Byrne, an agent of the Department of Arts and Sciences.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Byrne," said Weill. "In what way can I be of service?"

"Are we private here?" asked the agent. He had an unexpected baritone.

"Quite private."

"Then, if you don't mind, I'll ask you to absorb this." Byrne produced a small and battered cylinder and held it out between thumb and forefinger.

Weill took it, hefted it, turned it this way and that and said with a denture-revealing smile, "Not the product of Dreams, Inc., Mr. Byrne."

"I didn't think it was," said the agent. "I'd still like you to absorb it. I'd set the automatic cutoff for about a minute, though."

"That's all that can be endured?" Weill pulled the receiver to his desk and placed the cylinder into the unfreeze compartment. He removed it, polished either end of the cylinder with his handkerchief and tried again. "It doesn't make good contact," he said. "An amateurish job."

He placed the cushioned unfreeze helmet over his skull and adjusted the temple contacts, then set the automatic cutoff. He leaned back and clasped his hands over his chest and began absorbing.

His fingers grew rigid and clutched at his jacket. After the cutoff had brought absorption to an end, he removed the unfreezer and looked faintly angry. "A raw piece," he said. "It's lucky I'm an old man so that such things no longer bother me."

Byrne said stiffly, "It's not the worst we've found. And the fad is increasing."

Weill shrugged. "Pornographic dreamies. It's a logical development, I suppose."

The government man said, "Logical or not, it represents a deadly danger for the moral fiber of the nation."

"The moral fiber," said Weill, "can take a lot of beating. Erotica of one form or another has been circulated all through history."

"Not like this, sir. A direct mind-to-mind stimulation is much more effective than smoking-room stories or filthy pictures. Those must be filtered through the senses and lose some of their effect in that way."

Weill could scarcely argue that point. He said, "What would you have me do?"

"Can you suggest a possible source for this cylinder?"

"Mr. Byrne, I'm not a policeman."

"No, no, I'm not asking you to do our work for us. The Department is quite capable of conducting its own

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investigations. Can you help us, I mean, from your own specialized knowledge? You say your company did not put out that filth. Who did?"

"No reputable dream-distributor. I'm sure of that. It's too cheaply made."

"That could have been done on purpose."

"And no professional dreamer originated it."

"Are you sure, Mr. Weill? Couldn't dreamers do this sort of thing for some small illegitimate concern for money — or for fun?"

"They could, but not this particular one. No overtones. It's two-dimensional. Of course, a thing like this doesn't need overtones."

"What do you mean, overtones?"

Weill laughed gently, "You are not a dreamie fan?"

Byrne tried not to look virtuous and did not entirely succeed. "I prefer music."

"Well, that's all right, too," said Weill, tolerantly, "but it makes it a little harder to explain overtones. Even people who absorb dreamies might not be able to explain if you asked them. Still they'd know a dreamie was no good if the overtones were missing, even if they couldn't tell you why. Look, when an experienced dreamer goes into reverie, he doesn't think a story like in the old-fashioned television or book-films. It's a series of little visions. Each one has several meanings. If you studied them carefully, you'd find maybe five or six. While absorbing them in the ordinary way, you would never notice, but careful study shows it. Believe me, my psychological staff puts in long hours on just that point. All the overtones, the different meanings, blend together into a mass of guided emotion. Without them, everything would be flat, tasteless.

"Now this morning, I tested a young boy. A ten-year-old with possibilities. A cloud to him isn't just a cloud, it's a pillow too. Having the sensations of both, it was more than either. Of course, the boy's very primitive. But when he's through with his schooling, he'll be trained and disciplined. He'll be subjected to all sorts of sensations. He'll store up experience. He'll study and analyze classic dreamies of the past. He'll learn how to control and direct his thoughts, though, mind you, I have always said that when a good dreamer improvises —"

Weill halted abruptly, then proceeded in less impassionated tones, "I shouldn't get excited. All I'm trying to bring out now is that every professional dreamer has his own type of overtones which he can't mask. To an expert it's like signing his name on the dreamie. And I, Mr. Byrne, know all the signatures. Now that piece of dirt you brought me has no overtones at all. It was done by an ordinary person. A little talent, maybe, but like you and me, he can't think."

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Byrne reddened a trifle. "Not everyone can't think, Mr. Weill, even if they don't make dreamies."

"Oh, tush," and Weill wagged his hand in the air. "Don't be angry with what an old man says. I don't mean *think* as in *reason*. I mean *think* as in *dream*. We all can dream after a fashion, just like we all can run. But can you and I run a mile in under four minutes? You and I can talk but are we Daniel Websters? Now when I think of a steak, I think of the word. Maybe I have a quick picture of a brown steak on a platter. Maybe you have a better pictorialization of it and you can see the crisp fat and the onions and the baked potato. I don't know. But a *dreamer* . . . He sees it and smells it and tastes it and everything about it, with the charcoal and the satisfied feeling in the stomach and the way the knife cuts through it and a hundred other things all at once. Very sensual. Very sensual. You and I can't do it."

"Well then," said Byrne, "no professional dreamer has done this. That's something anyway." He put the cylinder in his inner jacket pocket. "I hope we'll have your full cooperation in squelching this sort of thing."

"Positively, Mr. Byrne. With a whole heart."

"I hope so." Byrne spoke with a consciousness of power. "It's not up to me, Mr. Weill, to say what will be done and what won't be done, but this sort of thing" — he tapped the cylinder he had brought — "will make it awfully tempting to impose a really strict censorship on dreamies."

He rose. "Good day, Mr. Weill."

"Good day, Mr. Byrne. I'll hope always for the best."

Francis Belanger burst into Jesse Weill's office in his usual steaming tizzy, his reddish hair disordered and his face aglow with worry and a mild perspiration. He was brought up sharply by the sight of Weill's head cradled in the crook of his elbow and bent on the desk until only the glimmer of white hair was visible.

Belanger swallowed. "Boss?"

Weill's head lifted. "It's you, Frank?"

"What's the matter, boss? Are you sick?"

"I'm old enough to be sick, but I'm on my feet. Staggering, but on my feet. A government man was here."

"What did he want?"

"He threatens censorship. He brought a sample of what's going round. Cheap dreamies for bottle parties."

"God damn!" said Belanger, feelingly.

"The only trouble is that morality makes for good campaign fodder. They'll be hitting out everywhere. And to tell the truth, we're vulnerable, Frank."

"*We* are? Our stuff is clean. We play up adventure and romance."

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Weill thrust out his lower lip and wrinkled his forehead. "Between us, Frank, we don't have to make believe. Clean? It depends on how you look at it. It's not for publication, maybe, but you know and I know that every dreamie has its Freudian connotations. You can't deny it."

"Sure, if you *look* for it. If you're a psychiatrist —"

"If you're an ordinary person, too. The ordinary observer doesn't know it's there and maybe he couldn't tell a phallic symbol from a mother image even if you pointed them out. Still, his subconscious knows. And it's the connotations that make many a dreamie click."

"All right, what's the government going to do? Clean up the subconscious?"

"It's a problem. I don't know what they're going to do. What we have on our side, and what I'm mainly depending on, is the fact that the public loves its dreamies and won't give them up. — Meanwhile, what did you come in for? You want to see me about something, I suppose?"

Belanger tossed an object onto Weill's desk and shoved his shirt-tail deeper into his trousers.

Weill broke open the glistening plastic cover and took out the enclosed cylinder. At one end was engraved in a too-fancy script in pastel blue: *Along the Himalayan Trail.* It bore the mark of Luster-Think.

"The Competitor's Product." Weill said it with capitals and his lips twitched. "It hasn't been published yet. Where did you get it, Frank?"

"Never mind. I just want you to absorb it."

Weill sighed. "Today, everyone wants me to absorb dreams. Frank, it's not dirty?"

Belanger said testily, "It has your Freudian symbols. Narrow crevasses between the mountain peaks. I hope that won't bother you."

"I'm an old man. It stopped bothering me years ago, but that other thing was so poorly done, it hurt. — All right, let's see what you've got here."

Again the recorder. Again the unfreezer over his skull and at the temples. This time, Weill rested back in his chair for fifteen minutes or more, while Francis Belanger went hurriedly through two cigarettes.

When Weill removed the headpiece and blinked dream out of his eyes, Belanger said, "Well, what's your reaction, boss?"

Weill corrugated his forehead. "It's not for me. It was repetitious. With competition like this, Dreams, Inc. doesn't have to worry yet."

"That's your mistake, boss. Luster-Think's going to win with stuff like this. We've got to do something."

"Now, Frank —"

"No, you listen. This is the coming thing."

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"*This?*" Weill stared with half-humorous dubiety at the cylinder. "It's amateurish. It's repetitious. Its overtones are very unsubtle. The snow had a distinct lemon sherbet taste. Who tastes lemon sherbet in snow these days, Frank? In the old days, yes. Twenty years ago, maybe. When Lyman Harrison first made his Snow Symphonies for sale down south, it was a big thing. Sherbet and candy-striped mountain tops and sliding down chocolate-covered cliffs. It's slapstick, Frank. These days it doesn't go."

"Because," said Belanger," you're not up with the times, boss, I've got to talk to you straight. When you started the dreamie business, when you bought up the basic patents and began putting them out, dreamies were luxury stuff. The market was small and individual. You could afford to turn out specialized dreamies and sell them to people at high prices."

"I know," said Weill, "and we've kept that up. But also we've opened a rental business for the masses."

"Yes, we have and it's not enough. Our dreamies have subtlety, yes. They can be used over and over again. The tenth time you're still finding new things, still getting new enjoyment. But how many people are connoisseurs? And another thing. Our stuff is strongly individualized. They're First Person."

"Well?"

"Well, Luster-Think is opening dream-palaces. They've opened one with three hundred booths in Nashville. You walk in, take your seat, put on your unfreezer and get your dream. Everyone in the audience gets the same one."

"I've heard of it, Frank, and it's been done before. It didn't work the first time and it won't work now. You want to know why it won't work? Because in the first place, dreaming is a private thing. Do you like your neighbor to know what you're dreaming? In the second place, in a dream palace the dreams have to start on schedule, don't they? So the dreamer has to dream not when he wants to but when some palace manager says he should. Finally, a dream one person likes, another person doesn't like. In those three hundred booths, I guarantee you, a hundred and fifty people are dissatisfied. And if they're dissatisfied, they won't come back."

Slowly, Belanger rolled up his sleeves and opened his collar. "Boss," he said, "you're talking through your hat. What's the use of proving they won't work? They *are* working. The word came through today that Luster-Think is breaking ground for a thousand-booth palace in St. Louis. People can get used to public dreaming, if everyone else in the same room is having the same dream. And they can adjust themselves to having it at a given time, as long as it's cheap and convenient.

"Damn it, boss, it's a social affair.

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A boy and a girl go to a dream-palace and absorb some cheap romantic thing with stereotyped overtones and commonplace situations, but still they come out with stars sprinkling their hair. They've had the same dream together. They've gone through identical sloppy emotions. They're *in tune*, boss. You bet they go back to the dream-palace, and all their friends go, too."

"And if they don't like the dream?"

"That's the point. That's the nub of the whole thing. They're bound to like it. If you prepare Hillary specials with wheels within wheels within wheels, with surprise twists on the third-level undertones, with clever shifts of significance and all the other things we're so proud of, why, naturally, it won't appeal to everyone. Specialized dreamies are for specialized tastes. But Luster-Think is turning out simple jobs in Third Person so both sexes can be hit at once. Like what you've just absorbed. Simple, repetitious, commonplace. They're aiming at the lowest common denominator. No one will love it, maybe, but no one will hate it."

Weill sat silent for a long time and Belanger watched him. Then Weill said, "Frank, I started on quality and I'm staying there. Maybe you're right. Maybe dream-palaces are the coming thing. If so we'll open them, but we'll use good stuff. Maybe Luster-Think underestimates ordinary people. Let's go slowly and not panic. I have based all my policies on the theory that there's always a market for quality. Sometimes, my boy, it would surprise you how big a market."

"Boss —"

The sounding of the intercom interrupted Belanger.

"What is it, Ruth?" said Weill.

The voice of his secretary said, "It's Mr. Hillary, sir. He wants to see you right away. He says it's important."

"Hillary?" Weill's voice registered shock. Then, "Wait five minutes, Ruth, then send him in."

Weill turned to Belanger. "Today, Frank, is definitely not one of my good days. A dreamer should be at home with his thinker. And Hillary's our best dreamer, so he especially should be at home. What do you suppose is wrong with him?"

Belanger, still brooding over Luster-Think and dream-palaces, said shortly, "Call him in and find out."

"In one minute. Tell me, how was his last dream? I haven't absorbed the one that came in last week."

Belanger came down to earth. He wrinkled his nose. "Not so good."

"Why not?"

"It was ragged. Too jumpy. I don't mind sharp transitions for the liveliness, you know, but there's got to be some connection, even if only on a deep level."

"Is it a total loss?"

"No Hillary dream is a *total* loss. It took a lot of editing though.

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We cut it down quite a bit and spliced in some odd pieces he'd sent us now and then. You know, detached scenes. It's still not Grade A, but it will pass."

"You told him about this, Frank?"

"Think I'm crazy, boss? Think I'm going to say a harsh word to a dreamer?"

And at that point the door opened and Weill's comely young secretary smiled Sherman Hillary into the office.

Sherman Hillary, at the age of 31, could have been recognized as a dreamer by anyone. His eyes, though unspectacled, had nevertheless the misty look of one who either needs glasses or who rarely focuses on anything mundane. He was of average height but underweight, with black hair that needed cutting, a narrow chin, a pale skin and a troubled look.

He muttered, "Hello, Mr. Weill," and half-nodded in hangdog fashion in the direction of Belanger.

Weill said, heartily, "Sherman, my boy, you look fine. What's the matter? A dream is cooking only so-so at home? You're worried about it? — Sit down, sit down."

The dreamer did, sitting at the edge of the chair and holding his thighs stiffly together as though to be ready for instant obedience to a possible order to stand up once more.

He said, "I've come to tell you, Mr. Weill, I'm quitting."

"Quitting?"

"I don't want to dream anymore, Mr. Weill."

Weill's old face looked older now than at any time during the day. "Why, Sherman?"

The dreamer's lips twisted. He blurted out, "Because I'm not *living*, Mr. Weill. Everything passes me by. It wasn't so bad at first. It was even relaxing. I'd dream evenings, weekends when I felt like it or any other time. And when I felt like it I wouldn't. But now, Mr. Weill, I'm an old pro. You tell me I'm one of the best in the business and the industry looks to me to think up new subtleties and new changes on the old reliables like the flying reveries, and the worm-turning skits."

Weill said, "And is anyone better than you, Sherman? Your little sequence on leading an orchestra is selling steadily after ten years."

"All right, Mr. Weill. I've done my part. It's gotten so I don't go out any more. I neglect my wife. My little girl doesn't know me. Last week we went to a dinner party — Sarah made me — and I don't remember a bit of it. Sarah says I was sitting on the couch all evening just staring at nothing and humming. She said everyone kept looking at me. She cried all night. I'm tired of things like that, Mr. Weill. I want to be a normal person and live in this world. I promised her I'd quit and I will, so it's goodby, Mr. Weill." Hillary stood up and held out his hand awkwardly.

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Weill waved it gently away. "If you want to quit, Sherman, it's all right. But do an old man a favor and let me explain something to you."

"I'm not going to change my mind," said Hillary.

"I'm not going to try to make you. I just want to explain something. I'm an old man and even before you were born I was in this business, so I like to talk about it. Humor me, Sherman? Please?"

Hillary sat down. His teeth clamped down on his lower lip and he stared sullenly at his fingernails.

Weill said, "Do you know what a dreamer is, Sherman? Do you know what he means to ordinary people? Do you know what it is to be like me, like Frank Belanger, like your wife Sarah? To have crippled minds that can't imagine, that can't build up thoughts? People like myself, ordinary people, would like to escape just once in a while this life of ours. We can't. We need help.

"In olden times it was books, plays, movies, radio, television. They gave us make-believe, but that wasn't important. What *was* important was that for a little while our own imaginations were stimulated. We could think of handsome lovers and beautiful princesses. We could be attractive, witty, strong, capable — everything we weren't.

"But always the passing of the dream from dreamer to absorber was not perfect. It had to be translated into words in one way or another. The best dreamer in the world might not be able to get any of it into words. And the best writer in the world could put only the smallest part of his dreams into words. You understand?

"But now, with dream-recording, any man can dream. You, Sherman, and a handful of men like you supply those dreams directly and exactly. It's straight from your head into ours, full strength. You dream for a hundred million people every time you dream. You dream a hundred million dreams at once. This is a great thing, my boy. You give all those people a glimpse of something they could not have by themselves."

Hillary mumbled, "I've done my share." He rose desperately to his feet. "I'm through. I don't care what you say. And if you want to sue me for breaking our contract, go ahead and sue. I don't care."

Weill stood up too. "Would I sue you? — Ruth," he spoke into the intercom, "bring in our copy of Mr. Hillary's contract."

He waited. So did Hillary and Belanger. Weill smiled faintly and his yellowed fingers drummed softly on his desk.

His secretary brought in the contract. Weill took it, showed its face to Hillary and said, "Sherman, my boy, unless you *want* to be with me, it's not right you should stay."

Then before Belanger could make more than the beginning of a horrified gesture to stop him, he tore the

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contract into four pieces and tossed them down the waste-chute. "That's all."

Hillary's hand shot out to seize Weill's. "Thanks, Mr. Weill," he said, earnestly, his voice husky. "You've always treated me very well, and I'm grateful. I'm sorry it had to be like this."

"It's all right, my boy. It's all right."

Half in tears, still muttering thanks, Sherman Hillary left.

"For the love of Pete, boss, why did you let him go?" demanded Belanger. "Don't you see the game? He'll be going straight to Luster-Think. They've bought him off."

Weill raised his hand. "You're wrong. You're quite wrong. I know the boy and this would not be his style. Besides," he added dryly, "Ruth is a good secretary and she knows what to bring me when I ask for a dreamer's contract. The real contract is still in the safe, believe me."

"Meanwhile, a fine day I've had. I had to argue with a father to give me a chance at new talent, with a government man to avoid censorship, with you to keep from adopting fatal policies, and now with my best dreamer to keep him from leaving. The father I probably won out over. The government man and you, I don't know. Maybe yes, maybe no. But about Sherman Hillary, at least, there is no question. The dreamer will be back."

"How do you know?"

Weill smiled at Belanger and crinkled his cheeks into a network of fine lines. "Frank, my boy, you know how to edit dreamies so you think you know all the tools and machines of the trade. But let me tell you something. The most important tool in the dreamie business is the dreamer himself. He is the one you have to understand most of all, and I understand them.

"Listen. When I was a youngster — there were no dreamies then — I knew a fellow who wrote television scripts. He would complain to me bitterly that when someone met him for the first time and found out who he was, they would say: *Where do you get those crazy ideas?*

"They honestly didn't know. To them it was an impossibility to even think of one of them. So what could my friend say? He used to talk to me about it and tell me: 'Could I say, "I don't know"? When I go to bed I can't sleep for ideas dancing in my head. When I shave I cut myself; when I talk I lose track of what I'm saying; when I drive I take my life in my hands. And always because ideas, situations, dialogs are spinning and twisting in my mind. I can't tell you where I get my ideas. Can you tell me, maybe, your trick of *not* getting ideas, so I, too, can have a little peace?'

"You see, Frank, how it is. *You* can stop work here anytime. So can I. This is our job, not our life.

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But not Sherman Hillary. Wherever he goes, whatever he does, he'll dream. While he lives, he must think; while he thinks, he must dream. We don't hold him prisoner, our contract isn't an iron wall for him. His own skull is his prisoner. He'll be back. What can he do?"

Belanger shrugged. "If what you say is right, I'm sort of sorry for the guy."

Weill nodded sadly, "I'm sorry for all of them. Through the years, I've found out one thing. It's their business: making people happy. *Other* people."

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The Science Screen

by CHARLES BEAUMONT

A MONSTER IS A MONSTER IS NOT necessarily a monster, as demonstrated by this month's crop of films. They are all creature-features, dealing with divers hybrids and hybrid divers (zombies, robots, witches, giant octopuses, and fishmen) and though they differ from one another somewhat in terms of quality, they share a common, and grievous, fault: They are not scary.

Which may be an odd criticism, but not necessarily a niggling one; for this happens to be the avowed purpose of each picture. They were made, above all else, to frighten their audiences — the more, the better; and great and earnest pains were taken to insure the desired effect. The fact that one does not leave the theater with a case of the galloping willies can in no way be attributed to any lack of zeal on the part of the producers. They tried. Their Monsters, for instance, are veritable models of grotesqueness. No more could reasonably be asked. Whether lumbering, slithering, ululating, or simply standing around, they amply fulfill the time-honored Monsterial requisites. The Maidens, toward whom these nightmares are inevitably, if inexplicably, attracted, also do everything they ought to. Frail, lovely vessels, with cast-iron larynxes and eyes that widen to the size of cue balls, they shriek as if the very hounds of hell were after them and shrink wallwards as often as you could wish. And the Men are all heroic beyond belief.

Yet, with these classic elements herded together and given super-slick treatment, the films fail utterly to accomplish their aim.

At first I thought I knew the answer. It was a logical and quite brainy conclusion, well worth expansion into an *Atlantic* article. The films are not scary, I thought, because they are behind the times. After seeing what one obsolete atom bomb can do to an entire city, and remembering the newsreel shots of some of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki survivors, we can no longer shudder with dignity at something so mild as a ghost. In this age of casual calamity, when tomorrow's headlines could easily bring news of New York's total destruction, or of Moscow's, it takes more than an oversize octopus to give us the creeps. How can you be frightened by ectoplasm when you're in immediate danger of turning into the stuff yourself?

But this is a lot of malarky. It

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isn't the answer, nor is the fact that I am past my closet-peeping years. These films fail for one supremely simple reason:

They are incompetently written.

In their concern over the horripilatory effect, the writers have neglected one basic and unassailable truth, which is that a horror story is still a *story*. And a story is something about people. No one disputes that the rules of good drama should apply in every other sort of motion picture — in Westerns, mysteries, soap operas, musical comedies — but the current view seems to be that they do not apply here. For these rules have been studiously ignored. And the result is the same as in the early days of magazine science fiction, when the gadget, the machine, was the big thing in every yarn and people weren't important.

In short, these pictures are all payoff and no buildup. They are well-compiled freak shows and cinematic Grand Guignols; and the lot of them wouldn't disturb the sleep — or fire the imagination — of a hypersensitive ten-year-old.

A suggestion to prospective science fiction and horror film producers: Give us people first, and monsters, or spaceships, second. Give us as few as two flesh-and-blood human beings, let us have a chance to empathize with them; and *then* bring on your mutant menaces.

But put bones in the people, and let them not behave forever like ill-bred cretins. If they are to be handsome pipe-smoking physicists, or beautiful professors of archeology, overcome this by the plain expedient of providing them with decent dialogue. Permit them to speak and react approximately as humans do, and we'll be glad to forget that they're fundamentally stock. There wasn't an "average" person in KING KONG, yet that picture was a masterpiece; it scared hell out of the nation when it was released, and continues to do so on re-release. Why? Because it told a story and told it dramatically. It built suspense and mood and pitch. Most important, it acquainted you with the characters. When it was time for the monsters, you were prepared. And you weren't disappointed.

The same is true of dozens of others — THE CAT PEOPLE, THE ISLE OF THE DEAD, DEAD OF NIGHT, etc. These films are as frightening now as the day they were made. I saw a reissue of FRANKENSTEIN recently, and this fact was borne out.

It was a Saturday afternoon; the theater was full of kids, with and without their zip-guns. They behaved typically by issuing mock screams and loud jokes as the title came on, and I prepared, sadly, to leave. But then something happened. About ten minutes into the film, the noise began to die down. The screams continued, but they seemed a trifle strained and self-conscious; then they, too, subsided. Within half an hour the theater

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was as still as a columbarium — up to the part where Karloff approaches the little girl by the pond. At this point, there were screams of an entirely different nature. . . .

It was a rich and inexpressibly satisfying experience, proving as it did, dramatically, that our capacity for being scared is unimpaired.

We have our shivers ready.

We wait to tremble and feel our hearts shrink, delighted again to get our minds off our own possible extinction, pleased to be frightened at something small and personal.

But we must have stories, and people. Monsters aren't enough.

IT CAME FROM BENEATH THE SEA (Columbia) is, I fear, the best of the new ones, due mainly to the excellent special effects work of Ray Harryhausen. George Worthington Yates and Hal Smith collaborated on the screenplay, and though it is seldom downright painful, it is both technically and dramatically anemic, and remains upright only with the help of a dozen or so sturdy clichés. Mr. Yates is a competent hand, but I'm sorry to report that science fiction continues to baffle him. He is never strictly at home in this film except during the love sequences; these, however, are frequent enough to sustain his interest . . . while murdering ours.

What comes from beneath the sea this time is an octopus, by the way. It's a perfectly ordinary octopus, except that it is radioactive, approximately the size of the Chrysler building, and hungry. One of many such giants residing in the Great Mindanoan Deep, it would have been content to stay at home with the wife and children forever, if only we humans had not begun to monkey around with hydrogen bombs. But one of our Marshall Island experiments explodes in the neighborhood and the beast is instantly rendered radioactive. Forced to give up its everyday cuisine, for now it warns off its natural prey (are you listening, Mr. Ley?), it takes to attacking liners and eventually decides to feast upon San Francisco.

Unfortunately, a little common sense could have stopped the monster — and the film, too — after fifteen minutes.

Nothing whatever can stop the gill-man, however, for he is protected by the strongest force-field in existence: Money. The critics did their best to kill him off directly after his appearance in THE CREATURE FROM THE BLACK LAGOON, but he is going strong again in THE REVENGE OF THE CREATURE (Universal-International), and it is only too clear from the ending of this particular disaster that we have by no means seen the last of him. It's true that he is shot, but this doesn't fool anybody; after all, to a studio resourceful enough to explain how Frankenstein's monster managed to survive a bath of lava, what are a few lousy bullets?

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The Creature is after Lori Nelson in this one, incidentally — for what dark reasons only he knows. When he finally gets her, he has no idea what to do with her, except swim. This provides the necessary pathos, as well as most of the action.

THE CREATURE WITH THE ATOM BRAIN (Columbia) is a poor man's DONOVAN'S BRAIN, jazzed up to meet current demands. Curt Siodmak is responsible, and we ought to be understanding and kindly toward him because his conscience must be giving him an awfully rough time. Move mountains to avoid this one.

In THE WITCH RETURNS TO LIFE we are treated to a hilarious display of impromptu censorship, but there is little else of interest in this Finnish film. The yarn is hoary with age, presented with a total lack of skill, and as frequently banal as it is incomprehensible: An archeologist uncovers the grave of a beautiful witch; she is a malevolent force, but, since she looks more like a gum-chewing bobby-soxer (only without the sox, or any other stitch of clothing), the archeologist does his best to resuscitate her. The treatment is successful, and she goes to work at once, scaring horses, dancing nude in the moonlight, bringing out the evil in all and sundry, and otherwise engaging in witchy doings. It is all highly embarrassing.

Mika Walteri (author of THE EGYPTIAN) wrote and produced the film, to his eternal shame; a gentleman in New York censored it, to his.

Progress Report: Cause for hope is the recent purchase, by José Ferrer, of Alfred Bester's magnificent THE DEMOLISHED MAN. Ferrer will direct, and may star as Ben Reich.

(*Watch for Beaumont's next quarterly report on science-fantasy films in the March F&SF.*)

BLAZE OF GLORY

Little Willie made a slip
While landing in his rocket ship.
See that bright, actinic glare?
That's our little Willie there.

RANDALL GARRETT

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Hector Hugh Munro, whom we all know as "Saki," was peculiarly fascinated by the relation of the supernatural-to leg-pulling. You're surely familiar with The Open Window, *in which a "supernatural" event proves to be a leg-pull; and a year ago F&SF revived the less-known* The Seventh Pullet, *in which a seeming leg-pull is truly supernatural. Here is yet another variant, involving the Society for Psychical Research, a baleful hedgehog, and the infinite malice of genteel old ladies.*

The Hedgehog

by SAKI

A MIXED DOUBLE OF YOUNG PEOPLE were contesting a game of lawn tennis at the Rectory garden party; for the past five-and-twenty years at least mixed doubles of young people had done exactly the same thing on exactly the same spot at about the same time of year. The young people changed and made way for others in the course of time, but very little else seemed to alter.

The present players were sufficiently conscious of the social nature of the occasion to be concerned about their clothes and appearance, and sufficiently sport-loving to be keen on the game. Both their efforts and their appearance came under the four-fold scrutiny of a quartet of ladies sitting as official spectators on a bench immediately commanding the court. It was one of the accepted conditions of the Rectory garden party that four ladies, who usually knew very little about tennis and a great deal about the players, should sit at that particular spot and watch the game. It had also come to be almost a tradition that two ladies should be amiable, and that the other two should be Mrs. Dole and Mrs. Hatch-Mallard.

"What a singularly unbecoming way Eva Jonelet has taken to doing her hair in," said Mrs. Hatch-Mallard; "it's ugly hair at the best of times, but she needn't make it look ridiculous as well. Some one ought to tell her."

Eva Jonelet's hair might have escaped Mrs. Hatch-Mallard's condemnation if she could have forgotten the more glaring fact that Eva was Mrs. Dole's favourite niece. It would, perhaps, have been a more comfortable arrangement if Mrs. Hatch-Mallard and Mrs. Dole could have been asked to the Rec-

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tory on separate occasions, but there was only one garden party in the course of the year, and neither lady could have been omitted from the list of invitations without hopelessly wrecking the social peace of the parish.

"How pretty the yew trees look at this time of year," interposed a lady with a soft, silvery voice that suggested a chinchilla muff painted by Whistler.

"What do you mean by this time of year?" demanded Mrs. Hatch-Mallard. "Yew trees look beautiful at all times of the year. That is their great charm."

"Yew trees never look anything but hideous under any circumstances or at any time of year," said Mrs. Dole, with the slow, emphatic relish of one who contradicts for the pleasure of the thing. "They are only fit for graveyards and cemeteries."

Mrs. Hatch-Mallard gave a sardonic snort, which, being translated, meant that there were some people who were better fitted for cemeteries than for garden parties.

"What is the score, please?" asked the lady with the chinchilla voice.

The desired information was given her by a young gentleman in spotless white flannels, whose general toilet effect suggested solicitude rather than anxiety.

"What an odious young cub Bertie Dykson has become!" pronounced Mrs. Dole, remembering suddenly that Bertie was rather a favourite with Mrs. Hatch-Millard. "The young men of today are not what they used to be twenty years ago."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Hatch-Mallard; "twenty years ago Bertie Dykson was just two years old, and you must expect some difference in appearance and manner and conversation between those two periods."

"Do you know," said Mrs. Dole confidentially, "I shouldn't be surprised if that was intended to be clever."

"Have you any one interesting coming to stay with you, Mrs. Norbury?" asked the chinchilla voice hastily; "you generally have a house-party at this time of year."

"I've got a most interesting woman coming," said Mrs. Norbury, who had been mutely struggling for some chance to turn the conversation into a safe channel; "an old acquaintance of mine, Ada Bleek —"

"What an ugly name," said Mrs. Hatch-Mallard.

"She's descended from the de la Bliques, an old Huguenot family of Touraine, you know."

"There weren't any Huguenots in Touraine," said Mrs. Hatch-Mallard, who thought she might safely dispute any fact that was three hundred years old.

"Well, anyhow, she's coming to stay with me," continued Mrs. Norbury, bringing her story quickly down to the present day; "she

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arrives this evening and she's highly clairvoyante, a seventh daughter of a seventh daughter, you know, and all that sort of thing."

"How very interesting," said the chinchilla voice; "Exwood is just the right place for her to come to, isn't it? There are supposed to be several ghosts there."

"That is why she was so anxious to come," said Mrs. Norbury; "she put off another engagement in order to accept my invitation. She's had visions and dreams, and all those sort of things, that have come true in a most marvellous manner but she's never actually seen a ghost, and she's longing to have that experience. She belongs to that Research Society, you know."

"I expect she'll see the unhappy Lady Cullumpton, the most famous of all the Exwood ghosts," said Mrs. Dole; "my ancestor, you know, Sir Gervase Cullumpton, murdered his young bride in a fit of jealousy while they were on a visit to Exwood. He strangled her in the stables with a stirrup leather, just after they had come in from riding, and she is seen sometimes at dusk going about the lawns and the stable yard, in a long green habit, moaning and trying to get the thong from round her throat. I shall be most interested to hear if your friend sees —"

"I don't know why she should be expected to see a trashy, traditional apparition like the so-called Cullumpton ghost, that is only vouched for by house-maids and tipsy stable-boys, when my uncle, who was the owner of Exwood, committed suicide there under the most tragical circumstances, and most certainly haunts the place."

"Mrs. Hatch-Mallard has evidently never read *Popple's County History*," said Mrs. Dole icily, "or she would know that the Cullumpton ghost has a wealth of evidence behind it —"

"Oh, Popple!" exclaimed Mrs. Hatch-Mallard scornfully; "any rubbishy old story is good enough for him. Popple, indeed! Now my uncle's ghost was seen by a Rural Dean, who was also a Justice of the Peace. I should think that would be good enough testimony for any one. Mrs. Norbury, I shall take it as a deliberate personal affront if your clairvoyante friend sees any other ghost except that of my uncle."

"I dare say she won't see anything at all; she never has yet, you know," said Mrs. Norbury hopefully.

"It was a most unfortunate topic for me to have broached," she lamented afterwards to the owner of the chinchilla voice; "Exwood belongs to Mrs. Hatch-Mallard, and we've only got it on a short lease. A nephew of hers has been wanting to live there for some time, and if we offend her in any way she'll refuse to renew the lease. I sometimes think these garden parties are a mistake."

The Norburys played bridge for the next three nights till nearly 1 o'clock; they did not care for the

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game, but it reduced the time at their guest's disposal for undesirable ghostly visitations.

"Miss Bleek is not likely to be in a frame of mind to see ghosts," said Hugo Norbury, "if she goes to bed with her brain awhirl with royal spades and no trumps and grand slams."

"I've talked to her for hours about Mrs. Hatch-Mallard's uncle," said his wife, "and pointed out the exact spot where he killed himself, and invented all sorts of impressive details, and I've found an old portrait of Lord John Russell and put it in her room, and told her that it's supposed to be a picture of the uncle in middle age. If Ada does see a ghost at all it certainly ought to be old Hatch-Mallard's. At any rate, we've done our best."

The precautions were in vain. On the third morning of her stay Ada Bleek came down late to breakfast, her eyes looking very tired, but ablaze with excitement, her hair done anyhow, and a large brown volume hugged under her arm.

"At last I've seen something supernatural!" she exclaimed, and gave Mrs. Norbury a fervent kiss, as though in gratitude.

"A ghost!" cried Mrs. Norbury, "not really!"

"Really and unmistakably!"

"Was it an oldish man in the dress of about fifty years ago?" asked Mrs. Norbury hopefully.

"Nothing of the sort," said Ada; "it was a white hedgehog."

"A white hedgehog!" exclaimed both the Norburys, in tones of disconcerted astonishment.

"A huge white hedgehog with baleful yellow eyes," said Ada; "I was lying half asleep in bed when suddenly I felt a sensation as of something sinister and unaccountable passing through the room. I sat up and looked round, and there, under the window, I saw an evil, creeping thing, a sort of monstrous hedgehog, of a dirty white colour, with black, loathsome claws that clicked and scraped along the floor, and narrow, yellow eyes of indescribable evil. It slithered along for a yard or two, always looking at me with its cruel, hideous eyes, then, when it reached the second window, which was open, it clambered up the sill and vanished. I got up at once and went to the window; there wasn't a sign of it anywhere. Of course, I knew it must be something from another world, but it was not till I turned up Popple's chapter on local traditions that I realized what I had seen."

She turned eagerly to the large brown volume and read: " 'Nicholas Herison, an old miser, was hung at Batchford in 1763 for the murder of a farm lad who had accidentally discovered his secret hoard. His ghost is supposed to traverse the countryside, appearing sometimes as a white owl, sometimes as a huge white hedgehog.' "

"This must be hushed up," said Mrs. Norbury; "the servants —"

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"Hushed up!" exclaimed Ada, indignantly; "I'm writing a long report on it for the Research Society."

It was then that Hugo Norbury, who is not naturally a man of brilliant resource, had one of the really useful inspirations of his life.

"It was very wicked of us, Miss Bleek," he said, "but it would be a shame to let it go further. That white hedgehog is an old joke of ours; stuffed albino hedgehog, you know, that my father brought home from Jamaica, where they grow to enormous size. We hide it in the room with a string on it, run one end of the string through the window; then we pull it from below and it comes scraping along the floor, just as you've described, and finally jerks out of the window. Taken in heaps of people; they all read up Popple and think it's old Nicholas Herison's ghost; we always stop them from writing to the papers about it, though. That would be carrying matters too far."

Mrs. Hatch-Mallard renewed the lease in due course, but Ada Bleek has never attempted to renew her friendship.

Interview

"I would like to go back to Earth again," he said,
"And her tremendous skies. I would like to see
A world that is blue and green (with some seasonal red)
And various shades of brown. I remember" (he
Scratched here his chin) "that moon, as seen from Earth,
In its comprehensible stages (now hot gold,
Now threadbare linen) of pulsating girth.
I am," he said, "as yet not very old,
But it is hard to remember just Earth's look.
A man cannot carry the sight of a world in his head
(And that's forgetting the smell and the taste and the voice),
And most of what I say I got out of a book.
One world is enough. Still, if I had my choice,
I would like to go back to Earth again," he said.

BIRD FERGUSON

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Even an old introduction-monger is occasionally thrown for a loss. Here Gordon Dickson drives so directly and forcefully to his point that I can only say, "Read it!"

Of the People

by GORDON R. DICKSON

BUT YOU KNOW I COULD SENSE IT coming a long time off. It was a little extra time taken in drinking a cup of coffee, it was lingering over the magazines in a drugstore as I picked out a handful. It was a girl I looked at twice as I ran out and down the steps of a library.

And it wasn't any good and I knew it. But it kept coming and it kept coming; and one night I stayed working at the design of a power cruiser until it was finished, before I finally knocked off for supper; and then, after I'd eaten, I looked ahead down twelve dark hours to daylight; and I knew I'd had it.

So I got up and I walked out of the apartment. I left my glass half full and the record player I had built playing the music I had written to the pictures I had painted. Left the organ and the typewriter, left the darkroom and the lab. Left the jammed-full filing cabinets. Took the elevator and told the elevator boy to head for the ground floor. Walked out into the deep snow.

"You going out in January without an overcoat, Mr. Crossman?" asked the doorman.

"Don't need a coat," I told him. "Never no more, no coats."

"Don't you want me to phone the garage for your car, then?"

"Don't need a car."

I left him and I set out walking. After a while it began to snow, but not on me. And after a little more while people started to stare, so I flagged down a cab.

"Get out and give me the keys," I told the driver.

"You drunk?" he said.

"It's all right, son," I said. "I own the company. But you'll get out nonetheless and give me the keys." He got out and gave me the keys and I left him standing there.

I got in the cab and drove it off through the night-lit downtown streets; and I kissed the city goodby as I went. I blew a kiss to the grain exchange and a kiss to the stockyards. And a kiss to every one of the fourteen offices in the city that

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knew me each under a different title as head of a different business. You've got to get along without me now, city and people, I said, because I'm not coming back, no more, no more.

I drove out of downtown and out past Longview Acres and past Manor Acres and past Sherman Hills and I blew them all a kiss, too. Enjoy your homes, you people, I told them, because they're good homes — not the best I could have done you by a damn sight, but better than you'll see elsewhere in a long time, and your money's worth. Enjoy your homes and don't remember me.

I drove out to the airport and there I left the cab. It was a good airport. I'd laid it out myself and I knew. It was a good airport and I got eighteen days of good hard work out of the job. I got myself so lovely and tired doing it I was able to go out to the bars and sit there having half a dozen drinks — before the urge to talk to the people around me became unbearable and I had to get up and go home.

There were planes on the field. A good handful of them. I went in and talked to one of the clerks.

"Mr. Crossman!" he said, when he saw me.

"Get me a plane," I said. "Get me a plane headed east and then forget I was in tonight."

He did; and I went. I flew to New York; and changed planes and flew to London; and changed again and came in by jet to Bombay.

By the time I reached Bombay, my mind was made up for good, and I went through the city as if it were a dream of buildings and people and no more. I went through the town and out of the town and I hit the road north, walking. And as I walked, I took off my coat and my tie. And I opened my collar to the open air and I started my trek.

I was six weeks walking it. I remember little bits and pieces of things along the way — mainly faces, and mainly the faces of the children, for they aren't afraid when they're young. They'd come up to me and run alongside, trying to match the strides I'd take, and after a while they'd get tired and drop back — but there were always others along the way. And there were adults, too, men and women, but when they got close, they'd take one look at my face and go away again. There was only one who spoke to me in all that trip, and that was a tall, dark brown man in some kind of uniform. He spoke to me in English and I answered him in dialect. He was scared to the marrow of his bones, for after he spoke I could hear the little grinding of his teeth in the silence as he tried to keep them from chattering. But I answered him kindly, and told him I had business in the north that was nobody's business but my own. And when he still would not move — he was well over six feet and nearly as tall as I — I opened my right hand beneath his nose and showed him

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himself, small and weak as a caterpillar in the palm of it. And he fell out of my path as if his legs had all the strength gone out of them; and I went on.

I was six weeks walking it. And when I came to the hills, my beard was grown out and my pants and my shirt were in tatters. Also, by this time, the word had gone ahead of me. Not the official word, but the little words of little people, running from mouth to mouth. They knew I was coming and they knew where I was headed — to see the old man up beyond Mutteeanee Pass, the white holy man of the village between two peaks.

He was sitting on his rock out on the hillside, with his blind eyes following the sun and the beard running gray and old between his thin knees and down to the brown earth.

I sat down on another smaller rock before him and caught my breath.

"Well, Erik," I said. "I've come."

"I'm aware you have, Sam."

"By foot," I said. "By car and plane, too, but mostly by foot, as time goes. All the way from the lowlands by foot, Erik. And that's the last I do for any of them."

"For them, Sam?"

"For me, then."

"Not for you, either, Sam," he said. And then he sighed. "Go back, Sam," he said.

"Go back!" I echoed. "Go back to hell again? No thank you, Erik."

"You faltered," he said. "You weakened. You began to slow down, to look around. There was no need to, Sam. If you hadn't started to slacken off, you would have been all right."

"All right? Do you call the kind of life I lead, that? What do you use for a heart, Erik?"

"A heart?" And with that he lowered his blind old eyes from the sun and turned them right on me. "Do you accuse me, Sam?"

"With you it's choice," I said. "You can go."

"No," he shook his head. "I'm bound by choice, just as you are bound by the greater strength in me. Go back, Sam."

"Why?" I cried. And I pounded my chest like a crazy man. "Why me? Why can others go and I have to stay? There's no end to the universe. I don't ask for company, I'll find some lost hole somewhere and bury myself. Anywhere, just so I'm away."

"Would you, Sam?" he asked. And at that there was pity in his voice. When I did not answer, he went on, gently. "You see, Sam, that's exactly why I can't let you go. You're capable of deluding yourself, of telling yourself that you'll do what we both know you will not, cannot do. So you must stay."

"No," I said. "All right." I got up and turned to go. "I came to you first and gave you your chance. But now I'll go on my own, and I'll get off somehow."

"Sam, come back," he said. And

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abruptly, my legs were mine no longer.

"Sit down again," he said. "And listen for a minute."

My traitorous legs took me back; and I sat.

"Sam," he said, "you know the old story. Now and then, at rare intervals, one like us will be born. Nearly always, when they are grown, they leave. Only a few stay. But only once in thousands of years does one like yourself appear who must be chained against his will to our world."

"Erik," I said, between my teeth. "Don't sympathize."

"I'm not sympathizing, Sam," he said. "As you said, yourself, there is no end to the universe; but I have seen it all and there is no place in it for you. For the others that have gone out, there are places that are no places. They sup at alien tables, Sam, but always and forever as a guest. They left themselves behind when they went and they don't belong any longer, to our Earth."

He stopped for a moment; and I knew what was coming.

"But you, Sam," he said; and I heard his voice with my head bowed, staring at the brown dirt. He spoke tenderly. "Poor Sam. You'd never be able to leave the Earth behind. You're one of us, but the living cord binds you to the others. Never a man speaks to you, but your hands yearn towards him in friendship. Never a woman smiles your way, but love warms that frozen heart of yours. You can't leave them, Sam. If you went out now, you'd come back in time, and try to take them with you. You'd hurry them on before they are ripe. And there's no place out there in the universe for them — yet."

I tried to move, but could not. Tried to lift my face to his, but could not.

"Poor Sam," he said, "trapped by a common heart that chains the lightning of his brain. Go back, Sam. Go back to your cities and your people. Go back to a thousand little jobs, and the work that is no greater than theirs, but many times as much so that it drives you without a pause twenty, twenty-two hours a day. Go back, Sam, to your designing and your painting, to your music and your businesses, to your engineering and your landscaping, and all the other things. Go back and keep busy, so busy your brain fogs and you sleep without dreaming. And wait. Wait for the necessary years to pass until they grow and change and at last come to their destiny.

"When that time comes, Sam, they will go out. And you will go with them, blood of their blood, flesh of their flesh, kin and comrade to them all. You will be happier than any of us have ever been, when that time comes. But the years have still to pass; and now you must go back. Go back, Sam. Go back, go back, go back."

And so I have come back. O people that I hate and love!

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The word orphrey, *which has never appeared before in any science-fantasy magazine, is derived from the Old French* orfreis (*modern French* orfroi), *which stems in turn from the Low Latin* aurifrigium, *an obvious corruption of* auriphrygium (*Phrygian gold*), *which has also entered our language in the form of the adjective, made familiar by the poet Southey,* auriphrygiate. *You will find many other instances of the healthy educational stimulus afforded by contact with the mind of Pelham Grenville Wodehouse in this account of the fate of a pale young curate whose uncle was a middling-Mad Scientist.*

Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo

by P. G. WODEHOUSE

THE VILLAGE CHORAL SOCIETY HAD been giving a performance of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Sorcerer* in aid of the Church Organ Fund; and, as we sat in the window of the Anglers' Rest, smoking our pipes, the audience came streaming past us down the little street. Snatches of song floated to our ears, and Mr. Mulliner began to croon in unison.

" 'Ah me! I was a pa-ale you-oung curate then!' " chanted Mr. Mulliner in the rather snuffling voice in which the amateur singer seems to find it necessary to render the old songs.

"Remarkable," he said, resuming his natural tones, "how fashions change, even in clergymen. There are very few pale young curates nowadays."

"True," I agreed. "Most of them are beefy young fellows who rowed for their colleges. I don't believe I have ever seen a pale young curate."

"You never met my newphew Augustine, I think?"

"Never."

"The description in the song would have fitted him perfectly. You will want to hear all about my nephew Augustine."

At the time of which I am speaking (said Mr. Mulliner) my nephew Augustine was a curate, and very young and extremely pale. As a boy he had completely outgrown his strength, and I rather think that at his Theological College some of the wilder spirits must have bullied him; for when he went to Lower Briskett-in-the-Midden to assist the vicar, the Rev. Stanley Brandon, in

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his cure of souls, he was as meek and mild a young man as you could meet in a day's journey. He had flaxen hair, weak blue eyes, and the general demeanour of a saintly but timid codfish. Precisely, in short, the sort of young curate who seems to have been so common in the 'eighties, or whenever it was that Gilbert wrote *The Sorcerer*.

The personality of his immediate superior did little or nothing to help him to overcome his native diffidence. The Rev. Stanley Brandon was a huge and sinewy man of violent temper, whose red face and glittering eyes might well have intimidated the toughest curate. The Rev. Stanley had been a heavyweight boxer at Cambridge, and I gather from Augustine that he seemed to be always on the point of introducing into debates on parish matters the methods which had made him so successful in the roped ring. I remember Augustine telling me that once, on the occasion when he had ventured to oppose the other's views in the matter of decorating the church for the Harvest Festival, he thought for a moment that the vicar was going to drop him with a right hook to the chin. It was some quite trivial point that had come up — a question as to whether the pumpkin would look better in the apse or the clerestory, if I recollect rightly — but for several seconds it seemed as if blood was about to be shed.

Such was the Rev. Stanley Brandon. And yet it was to the daughter of this formidable man that Augustine Mulliner had permitted himself to lose his heart. Truly, Cupid makes heroes of us all.

Jane was a very nice girl, and just as fond of Augustine as he was of her. But, as each lacked the nerve to go to the girl's father and put him abreast of the position of affairs, they were forced to meet surreptitiously. This jarred upon Augustine, who, like all the Mulliners, loved the truth and hated any form of deception. And one evening, as they paced beside the laurels at the bottom of the vicarage garden, he rebelled.

"My dearest," said Augustine, "I can no longer brook this secrecy. I shall go into the house immediately and ask your father for your hand."

Jane paled and clung to his arm. She knew so well that it was not her hand but her father's foot which he would receive if he carried out this mad scheme.

"No, no, Augustine! You must not!"

"But, darling, it is the only straightforward course."

"But not tonight. I beg of you, not tonight."

"Why not?"

"Because father is in a very bad temper. He has just had a letter from the bishop, rebuking him for wearing too many orphreys on his chasuble, and it has upset him terribly. You see, he and the bishop were at school together, and father can

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never forget it. He said at dinner that if old Boko Bickerton thought he was going to order him about he would jolly well show him."

"And the bishop comes here tomorrow for the Confirmation services!" gasped Augustine.

"Yes. And I'm so afraid they will quarrel. It's such a pity father hasn't some other bishop over him. He always remembers that he once hit this one in the eye for pouring ink on his collar, and this lowers his respect for his spiritual authority. So you won't go in and tell him tonight, will you?"

"I will not," Augustine assured her with a slight shiver.

"And you will be sure to put your feet in hot mustard and water when you get home? The dew has made the grass so wet."

"I will indeed, dearest."

"You are not strong, you know."

"No, I am not strong."

"You ought to take some really good tonic."

"Perhaps I ought. Good night, Jane."

"Good night, Augustine."

The lovers parted. Jane slipped back into the vicarage, and Augustine made his way to his cosy rooms in the High Street. And the first thing he noticed on entering was a parcel on the table, and beside it a letter.

He opened it listlessly, his thoughts far away.

"*My dear Augustine.*"

He turned to the last page and glanced at the signature. The letter was from his Aunt Angela, the wife of my brother, Wilfred Mulliner. You may remember that I once told you the story of how these two came together.* If so, you will recall that my brother Wilfred was the eminent chemical researcher who had invented, among other specifics, such world-famous preparations as Mulliner's Raven Gipsy Face-Cream and the Mulliner Snow of the Mountains Lotion. He and Augustine had never been particularly intimate, but between Augustine and his aunt there existed a warm friendship.

My dear Augustine (wrote Angela Mulliner),

I have been thinking so much about you lately, and I cannot forget that, when I saw you last, you seemed very fragile and deficient in vitamines. I do hope you take care of yourself.

I have been feeling for some time that you ought to take a tonic, and by a lucky chance Wilfred has just invented one which he tells me is the finest thing he has ever done. It is called Buck-U-Uppo, and acts directly on the red corpuscles. It is not yet on the market, but I have managed to smuggle a sample bottle from Wilfred's laboratory, and I want you to try it at once. I am sure it is just what you need.

Your affectionate aunt,
Angela Mulliner.

P. S. — You take a tablespoonful before going to bed, and another just before breakfast.

* *A Slice of Life*, F&SF, June, 1955.

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Augustine was not an unduly superstitious young man, but the coincidence of this tonic arriving so soon after Jane had told him that a tonic was what he needed affected him deeply. It seemed to him that this thing must have been meant. He shook the bottle, uncorked it, and, pouring out a liberal tablespoonful, shut his eyes and swallowed it.

The medicine, he was glad to find, was not unpleasant to the taste. It had a slightly pungent flavour, rather like old boot-soles beaten up in sherry. Having taken the dose, he read for a while in a book of theological essays, and then went to bed.

And as his feet slipped between the sheets, he was annoyed to find that Mrs. Wardle, his housekeeper, had once more forgotten his hot-water bottle.

"Oh, dash!" said Augustine.

He was thoroughly upset. He had told the woman over and over again that he suffered from cold feet and could not get to sleep unless the dogs were properly warmed up. He sprang out of bed and went to the head of the stairs.

"Mrs. Wardle!" he cried.

There was no reply.

"Mrs. Wardle!" bellowed Augustine in a voice that rattled the window-panes like a strong nor'-easter. Until tonight he had always been very much afraid of his housekeeper and had both walked and talked softly in her presence. But now he was conscious of a strange new fortitude. His head was singing a little, and he felt equal to a dozen Mrs. Wardles.

Shuffling footsteps made themselves heard.

"Well, what is it now?" asked a querulous voice.

Augustine snorted.

"I'll tell you what it is now," he roared. "How many times have I told you always to put a hot-water bottle in my bed? You've forgotten it again, you old cloth-head!"

Mrs. Wardle peered up, astounded and militant.

"Mr. Mulliner, I am not accustomed —"

"Shut up!" thundered Augustine. "What I want from you is less back-chat and more hot-water bottles. Bring it up at once, or I leave tomorrow. Let me endeavour to get it into your concrete skull that you aren't the only person letting rooms in this village. Any more lip and I walk straight round the corner, where I'll be appreciated. Hot-water bottle ho! And look slippy about it."

"Yes, Mr. Mulliner. Certainly, Mr. Mulliner. In one moment, Mr. Mulliner."

"Action! Action!" boomed Augustine. "Show some speed. Put a little snap into it."

"Yes, yes, most decidedly, Mr. Mulliner," replied the chastened voice from below.

An hour later, as he was dropping off to sleep, a thought crept into Augustine's mind. Had he not been a little brusque with Mrs. Wardle?

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Had there not been in his manner something a shade abrupt — almost rude? Yes, he decided regretfully, there had. He lit a candle and reached for the diary which lay on the table at his bedside.

He made an entry.

The meek shall inherit the earth. Am I sufficiently meek? I wonder. This evening, when reproaching Mrs. Wardle, my worthy housekeeper, for omitting to place a hot-water bottle in my bed, I spoke quite crossly. The provocation was severe, but still I was surely to blame for allowing my passions to run riot. Mem: Must guard agst this.

But when he woke next morning, different feelings prevailed. He took his ante-breakfast dose of Buck-U-Uppo: and looking at the entry in the diary, could scarcely believe that it was he who had written it. "Quite cross?" Of course he had been quite cross. Wouldn't anybody be quite cross who was for ever being persecuted by beetle-wits who forgot hot-water bottles?

Erasing the words with one strong dash of a thick-leaded pencil, he scribbled in the margin a hasty "Mashed potatoes! Served the old idiot right!" and went down to breakfast.

He felt most amazingly fit. Undoubtedly, in asserting that this tonic of his acted forcefully upon the red corpuscles, his Uncle Wilfred had been right. Until that moment Augustine had never supposed that he had any red corpuscles; but now, as he sat waiting for Mrs. Wardle to bring him his fried egg, he could feel them dancing about all over him. They seemed to be forming rowdy parties and sliding down his spine. His eyes sparkled, and from sheer joy of living he sang a few bars from the hymn for those of riper years at sea.

He was still singing when Mrs. Wardle entered with a dish.

"What's this?" demanded Augustine, eying it dangerously.

"A nice fried egg, sir."

"And what, pray, do you mean by nice? It may be an amiable egg. It may be a civil, well-meaning egg. But if you think it is fit for human consumption, adjust that impression. Go back to your kitchen, woman; select another; and remember this time that you are a cook, not an incinerating machine. Between an egg that is fried and an egg that is cremated there is a wide and substantial difference. This difference, if you wish to retain me as a lodger in these far too expensive rooms, you will endeavour to appreciate."

The glowing sense of well-being with which Augustine had begun the day did not diminish with the passage of time. It seemed, indeed, to increase. So full of effervescing energy did the young man feel that, departing from his usual custom of spending the morning crouched over the fire, he picked up his hat, stuck

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it at a rakish angle on his head, and sallied out for a healthy tramp across the fields.

It was while he was returning, flushed and rosy, that he observed a sight which is rare in the country districts of England — the spectacle of a bishop running. It is not often in a place like Lower Briskett-in-the-Midden that you see a bishop at all; and when you do he is either riding in a stately car or pacing at a dignified walk. This one was sprinting like a Derby winner, and Augustine paused to drink in the sight.

The bishop was a large, burly bishop, built for endurance rather than speed; but he was making excellent going. He flashed past Augustine in a whirl of flying gaiters: and then, proving himself thereby no mere specialist but a versatile all-round athlete, suddenly dived for a tree and climbed rapidly into its branches. His motive, Augustine readily divined, was to elude a rough, hairy dog which was toiling in his wake. The dog reached the tree a moment after his quarry had climbed it, and stood there, barking.

Augustine strolled up.

"Having a little trouble with the dumb friend, bish?" he asked, genially.

The bishop peered down from his eyrie.

"Young man," he said, "save me!"

"Right most indubitably ho!" replied Augustine. "Leave it to me."

Until today he had always been terrified of dogs, but now he did not hesitate. Almost quicker than words can tell, he picked up a stone, discharged it at the animal, and whooped cheerily as it got home with a thud. The dog, knowing when he had had enough, removed himself at some 45 m.p.h.; and the bishop, descending cautiously, clasped Augustine's hand in his.

"My preserver!" said the bishop.

"Don't give it another thought," said Augustine, cheerily. "Always glad to do a pal a good turn. We clergymen must stick together."

"I thought he had me for a minute."

"Quite a nasty customer. Full of rude energy."

The bishop nodded.

"His eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated. Deuteronomy xxxiv. 7," he agreed. "I wonder if you can direct me to the vicarage? I fear I have come a little out of my way."

"I'll take you there."

"Thank you. Perhaps it would be as well if you did not come in. I have a serious matter to discuss with old Pieface — I mean, with the Rev. Stanley Brandon."

"I have a serious matter to discuss with his daughter. I'll just hang about the garden."

"You are a very excellent young man," said the bishop, as they walked along. "You are a curate, eh?"

"At present. But," said Augustine, tapping his companion on the chest, "just watch my smoke.

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That's all I ask you to do — just watch my smoke."

"I will. You should rise to great heights — to the very top of the tree."

"Like you did just now, eh? Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha!" said the bishop. "You young rogue!"

He poked Augustine in the ribs.

"Ha, ha, ha!" said Augustine.

He slapped the bishop on the back.

"But all joking aside," said the bishop as they entered the vicarage grounds, "I really shall keep my eye on you and see that you receive the swift preferment which your talents and character deserve. I say to you, my dear young friend, speaking seriously and weighing my words, that the way you picked that dog off with that stone was the smoothest thing I ever saw. And I am a man who always tells the strict truth."

"Great is truth and mighty above all things. Esdras iv. 41," said Augustine.

He turned away and strolled towards the laurel bushes, which were his customary meeting-place with Jane. The bishop went on to the front door and rang the bell.

Although they had made no definite appointment, Augustine was surprised when the minutes passed and no Jane appeared. He did not know that she had been told off by her father to entertain the bishop's wife that morning, and show her the sights of Lower Briskett-in-the-Midden. He waited some quarter of an hour with growing impatience, and was about to leave when suddenly from the house there came to his ears the sound of voices raised angrily.

He stopped. The voices appeared to proceed from a room on the ground floor facing the garden.

Running lightly over the turf, Augustine paused outside the window and listened. The window was open at the bottom, and he could hear quite distinctly.

The vicar was speaking in a voice that vibrated through the room.

"Is that so?" said the vicar.

"Yes, it is!" said the bishop.

"Ha, ha!"

"Ha, ha! to you, and see how you like it!" rejoined the bishop with spirit.

Augustine drew a step closer. It was plain that Jane's fears had been justified and that there was serious trouble afoot between these two old schoolfellows. He peeped in. The vicar, his hands behind his coat-tails, was striding up and down the carpet, while the bishop, his back to the fireplace, glared defiance at him from the hearth-rug.

"Who ever told you you were an authority on chasubles?" demanded the vicar.

"That's all right who told me," rejoined the bishop.

"I don't believe you know what a chasuble is."

"Is that so?"

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"Well, what is it, then?"

"It's a circular cloak hanging from the shoulders, elaborately embroidered with a pattern and with orphreys. And you can argue as much as you like, young Pieface, but you can't get away from the fact that there are too many orphreys on yours. And what I'm telling you is that you've jolly well got to switch off a few of those orphreys or you'll get it in the neck."

The vicar's eyes glittered furiously.

"Is that so?" he said. "Well, I just won't, so there! And it's like your cheek coming here and trying to high-hat me. You seem to have forgotten that I knew you when you were an inky-faced kid at school, and that, if I liked, I could tell the world one or two things about you which would probably amuse it."

"My past is an open book."

"Is it?" The vicar laughed malevolently. "Who put the white mouse in the French master's desk?"

The bishop started.

"Who put jam in the dormitory prefect's bed?" he retorted.

"Who couldn't keep his collar clean?"

"Who used to wear a dickey?" The bishop's wonderful organ-like voice, whose softest whisper could be heard throughout a vast cathedral, rang out in tones of thunder. "Who was sick at the house supper?"

The vicar quivered from head to foot. His rubicund face turned a deeper crimson.

"You know jolly well," he said, in shaking accents, "that there was something wrong with the turkey. Might have upset any one."

"The only thing wrong with the turkey was that you ate too much of it. If you had paid as much attention to developing your soul as you did to developing your tummy, you might by now," said the bishop, "have risen to my own eminence."

"Oh, might I?"

"No, perhaps I am wrong. You never had the brain."

The vicar uttered another discordant laugh.

"Brain is good! We know all about your eminence, as you call it, and how you rose to that eminence."

"What do you mean?"

"You are a bishop. How you became one we will not inquire."

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. We will not inquire."

"Why don't you inquire?"

"Because," said the vicar, "it is better not!"

The bishop's self-control left him. His face contorted with fury, he took a step forward. And simultaneously Augustine sprang lightly into the room.

"Now, now, now!" said Augustine. "Now, now, now, now, now!"

The two men stood transfixed. They stared at the intruder dumbly.

"Come, come!" said Augustine.

The vicar was the first to recover. He glowered at Augustine.

"What do you mean by jumping through my window?" he thun-

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dered. "Are you a curate or a harlequin?"

Augustine met his gaze with an unfaltering eye.

"I am a curate," he replied, with a dignity that well became him. "And, as a curate, I cannot stand by and see two superiors of the cloth, who are moreover old schoolfellows, forgetting themselves. It isn't right. Absolutely not right, my dear old superiors of the cloth."

The vicar bit his lip. The bishop bowed his head.

"Listen," proceeded Augustine, placing a hand on the shoulder of each. "I hate to see you two dear good chaps quarrelling like this."

"He started it," said the vicar sullenly.

"Never mind who started it." Augustine silenced the bishop with a curt gesture as he made to speak. "Be sensible, my dear fellows. Respect the decencies of debate. Exercise a little good-humoured give-and-take. You say," he went on, turning to the bishop, "that our good friend here has too many orphreys on his chasuble?"

"I do. And I stick to it."

"Yes, yes, yes. But what," said Augustine, soothingly, "are a few orphreys between friends? Reflect! You and our worthy vicar here were at school together. You are bound by the sacred ties of the old Alma Mater. With him you sported on the green. With him you shared a crib and threw inked darts in the hour supposed to be devoted to the study of French. Do these things mean nothing to you? Do these memories touch no chord?" He turned appealingly from one to the other. "Vicar! Bish!"

The vicar had moved away and was wiping his eyes. The bishop fumbled for a pocket handkerchief. There was a silence.

"Sorry, Pieface," said the bishop, in a choking voice.

"Shouldn't have spoken as I did, Boko," mumbled the vicar.

"If you want to know what I think," said the bishop, "you are right in attributing your indisposition at the house supper to something wrong with the turkey. I recollect saying at the time that the bird should never have been served in such a condition."

"And when you put that white mouse in the French master's desk," said the vicar, "you performed one of the noblest services to humanity of which there is any record. They ought to have made you a bishop on the spot."

"Pieface!"

"Boko!"

The two men clasped hands.

"Splendid!" said Augustine. "Everything hotsy-totsy now?"

"Quite, quite," said the vicar.

"As far as I am concerned, completely hotsy-totsy," said the bishop. He turned to his old friend solicitously. "You will continue to wear all the orphreys you want — will you not, Pieface?"

"No, no. I see now that I was

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wrong. From now on, Boko, I abandon orphreys altogether."

"But, Pieface —"

"It's all right," the vicar assured him. "I can take them or leave them."

"Splendid fellow!" The bishop coughed to hide his emotion, and there was another silence. "I think, perhaps," he went on, after a pause, "I should be leaving you now, my dear chap, and going in search of my wife. She is with your daughter, I believe, somewhere in the village."

"They are coming up the drive now."

"Ah, yes, I see them. A charming girl, your daughter."

Augustine clapped him on the shoulder.

"Bish," he exclaimed, "you said a mouthful. She is the dearest, sweetest girl in the whole world. And I should be glad, vicar, if you would give your consent to our immediate union. I love Jane with a good man's fervour, and I am happy to inform you that my sentiments are returned. Assure us, therefore, of your approval, and I will go at once and have the banns put up."

The vicar leaped as though he had been stung. Like so many vicars, he had a poor opinion of curates, and he had always regarded Augustine as rather below than above the general norm or level of the despised class.

"What!" he cried.

"A most excellent idea," said the bishop, beaming. "A very happy notion, I call it."

"My daughter!" The vicar seemed dazed. "My daughter marry a curate!"

"You were a curate once yourself, Pieface."

"Yes, but not a curate like that."

"No!" said the bishop. "You were not. Nor was I. Better for us both had we been. This young man, I would have you know, is the most outstandingly excellent young man I have ever encountered. Are you aware that scarcely an hour ago he saved me with the most consummate address from a large shaggy dog with black spots and a kink in his tail? I was sorely pressed, Pieface, when this young man came up and, with a readiness of resource and an accuracy of aim which it would be impossible to over-praise, got that dog in the short ribs with a rock and sent him flying."

The vicar seemed to be struggling with some powerful emotion. His eyes had widened.

"A dog with black spots?"

"Very black spots. But no blacker, I fear, than the heart they hid."

"And he really plugged him in the short ribs?"

"As far as I could see, squarely in the short ribs."

The vicar held out his hand.

"Mulliner," he said, "I was not aware of this. In the light of the facts which have just been drawn to my attention, I have no hesitation in saying that my objections are removed. I have had it in for that dog since the second Sunday before

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Septuagesima, when he pinned me by the ankle as I paced beside the river composing a sermon on Certain Alarming Manifestations of the So-called Modern Spirit. Take Jane. I give my consent freely. And may she be as happy as any girl with such a husband ought to be."

A few more affecting words were exchanged, and then the bishop and Augustine left the house. The bishop was silent and thoughtful.

"I owe you a great deal, Mulliner," he said at length.

"Oh, I don't know," said Augustine. "Would you say that?"

"A very great deal. You saved me from a terrible disaster. Had you not leaped through that window at that precise juncture and intervened, I really believe I should have pasted my dear old friend Brandon in the eye. I was sorely exasperated."

"Our good vicar can be trying at times," agreed Augustine.

"My fist was already clenched, and I was just hauling off for the swing when you checked me. What the result would have been, had you not exhibited a tact and discretion beyond your years, I do not like to think. I might have been unfrocked." He shivered at the thought, though the weather was mild. "I could never have shown my face at the Athenaeum again. But, tut, tut!" went on the bishop, "let us not dwell on what might have been. Speak to me of yourself. The vicar's charming daughter — you really love her?"

"I do, indeed."

The bishop's face had grown grave.

"Think well, Mulliner," he said. "Marriage is a serious affair. Do not plunge into it without due reflection. I myself am a husband, and, though singularly blessed in the possession of a devoted helpmeet, cannot but feel sometimes that a man is better off as a bachelor. Women, Mulliner, are odd."

"True," said Augustine.

"My own dear wife is the best of women. And, as I never weary of saying, a good woman is a wondrous creature, cleaving to the right and the good under all change; lovely in youthful comeliness, lovely all her life in comeliness of heart. And yet —"

"And yet?" said Augustine.

The bishop mused for a moment. He wriggled a little with an expression of pain, and scratched himself between the shoulder-blades.

"Well, I'll tell you," said the bishop. "It is a warm and pleasant day today, is it not?"

"Exceptionally clement," said Augustine.

"A fair, sunny day, made gracious by a temperate westerly breeze. And yet, Mulliner, if you will credit my statement, my wife insisted on my putting on my thick winter woollies this morning. Truly," sighed the bishop, "as a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion. Proverbs xi. 21."

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"Twenty-two," corrected Augustine.

"I should have said twenty-two. They are made of thick flannel, and I have an exceptionally sensitive skin. Oblige me, my dear fellow, by rubbing me in the small of the back with the ferrule of your stick. I think it will ease the irritation."

"But, my poor dear old bish," said Augustine, sympathetically, "this must not be."

The bishop shook his head ruefully.

"You would not speak so hardily, Mulliner, if you knew my wife. There is no appeal from her decrees."

"Nonsense," cried Augustine, cheerily. He looked through the trees to where the lady bishopess, escorted by Jane, was examining a lobelia through her lorgnette with just the right bend of cordiality and condescension. "I'll fix that for you in a second."

The bishop clutched at his arm.

"My boy! What are you going to do?"

"I'm just going to have a word with your wife and put the matter up to her as a reasonable woman. Thick winter woollies on a day like this! Absurd!" said Augustine. "Preposterous! I never heard such rot."

The bishop gazed after him with a leaden heart. Already he had come to love this young man like a son: and to see him charging so lightheartedly into the very jaws of destruction afflicted him with a deep and poignant sadness. He knew what his wife was like when even the highest in the land attempted to thwart her; and this brave lad was but a curate. In another moment she would be looking at him through her lorgnette: and England was littered with the shrivelled remains of curates at whom the lady bishopess had looked through her lorgnette. He had seen them wilt like salted slugs at the episcopal breakfast-table.

He held his breath. Augustine had reached the lady bishopess, and the lady bishopess was even now raising her lorgnette.

The bishop shut his eyes and turned away. And then — years afterwards, it seemed to him — a cheery voice hailed him: and, turning, he perceived Augustine bounding back through the trees.

"It's all right, bish," said Augustine.

"All — all right?" faltered the bishop.

"Yes. She says you can go and change into the thin cashmere."

The bishop reeled.

"But — but — but what did you say to her? What arguments did you employ?"

"Oh, I just pointed out what a warm day it was and jollied her along a bit —"

"Jollied her along a bit!"

"And she agreed in the most friendly and cordial manner. She has asked me to call at the Palace."

The bishop seized Augustine's hand.

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"My boy," he said in a broken voice, "you shall do more than call at the Palace. You shall come and live at the Palace. Become my secretary, Mulliner, and name your own salary. If you intend to marry, you will require an increased stipend. Become my secretary, boy, and never leave my side. I have needed somebody like you for years."

It was late in the afternoon when Augustine returned to his rooms, for he had been invited to lunch at the vicarage and had been the life and soul of the cheery little party.

"A letter for you, sir," said Mrs. Wardle, obsequiously.

Augustine took the letter.

"I am sorry to say I shall be leaving you shortly, Mrs. Wardle."

"Oh, sir! If there's anything I can do —"

"Oh, it's not that. The fact is, the bishop has made me his secretary, and I shall have to shift my toothbrush and spats to the Palace, you see."

"Well, fancy that, sir! Why, you'll be a bishop yourself one of these days."

"Possibly," said Augustine. "Possibly. And now let me read this."

He opened the letter. A thoughtful frown appeared on his face as he read:

My dear Augustine,

I am writing in some haste to tell you that the impulsiveness of your aunt has led to a rather serious mistake. She tells me that she dispatched to you yesterday by parcel post a sample bottle of my new Buck-U-Uppo, which she obtained without my knowledge from my laboratory. Had she mentioned what she was intending to do, I could have prevented a very unfortunate occurrence.

Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo is of two grades or qualities — the A and the B. The A is a mild, but strengthening, tonic designed for human invalids. The B, on the other hand, is purely for circulation in the animal kingdom, and was invented to fill a long-felt want throughout our Indian possessions.

As you are doubtless aware, the favourite pastime of the Indian Maharajahs is the hunting of the tiger of the jungle from the backs of elephants; and it has happened frequently in the past that hunts have been spoiled by the failure of the elephant to see eye to eye with its owner in the matter of what constitutes sport.

Too often elephants, on sighting the tiger, have turned and galloped home: and it was to correct this tendency on their part that I invented Mulliner's Buck-U-Uppo "B." One teaspoonful of the Buck-U-Uppo "B" administered in its morning bran-mash will cause the most timid elephant to trumpet loudly and charge the fiercest tiger without a qualm.

Abstain, therefore, from taking any of the contents of the bottle you now possess,

And believe me,
Your affectionate uncle
Wilfred Mulliner.

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Augustine remained for some time in deep thought after perusing this communication. Then, rising, he whistled a few bars of the psalm appointed for the twenty-sixth of June and left the room.

Half an hour later a telegraphic message was speeding over the wires. It ran as follows: —

Wilfred Mulliner,
The Gables,
Lesser Lossingham,
Salop.

Letter received. Send immediately, C. O. D., three cases of the "B." "Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store." Deuteronomy xxviii. 5.

Augustine.

Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES (are there ever any really foreseen ones in magazine publishing?) force the exclusion of the customary book department this month —which may be just as well since, as this is being written, the fall publishing season has barely begun. Next month the column will be back with a full survey of the fall's science-fantasy books (which will probably be a scantier lot than in recent years).

Meanwhile a few books for you not to miss, most of which will be reviewed here later in more detail: C. M. Kornbluth's NOT THIS AUGUST (Doubleday, $2.95*), best of the several recent Russian-occupation-of-U. S. stories and one of the year's strongest imaginative novels. Edward S. Aarons' ASSIGNMENT TO DISASTER (Gold Medal, 25¢), an above average espionage-suspense tale which verged on science fiction by placing an American satellite in the sky a month before our publicity release. Among reprints, John Dickson Carr's THE CROOKED HINGE (Dell, 25¢), another marginal item in the mystery line, non-fantasy but rich in sheer M. R. James fantasy-chills, and William Sloane's THE EDGE OF RUNNING WATER (Dodd, Mead, $3*), welcome revival of a 1939 novel very nearly as good as the author's TO WALK THE NIGHT. For lighter reading, Manning Coles's pleasingly absurd HAPPY RETURNS (Doubleday, $3*), a felicitous sequel to last year's ghost-comedy BRIEF CANDLES, and the incomparable MAD STRIKES BACK! (Ballantine, 35¢), even more outrageously funny (and acute) than THE MAD READER.

* Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered through F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details see p. 128.

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Among the many virtues of this short novel by Sturgeon is that it is not simply serialized-because-it's-too-long-for-a-oneshot, but adroitly constructed as a two-part story — so deftly that the story contains its own built-in synopsis. If you read Part I last month, you know the problems that beset that intensely human group of people in Bittelman's boarding house (under Alien Observation) and are eager to learn their solution. But even if you missed Part I, you can start in right here, without another word of extraneous explanation, and enjoy one of the best and warmest stories that even Sturgeon has written.

The [Widget], The [Wadget], and Boff

by THEODORE STURGEON

(Second of Two Parts)

SPECIAL ENTRY IN FIELD EXPEDITION [NOTEBOOK][1]: Since it is now [my] intention to prefer charges against [my] [partner-teammate] [Smith] and to use these [notes] as a formal [document] in the matter, [I] shall now summarize in detail the particulars of the case: [We] have been on Earth for [expression of time-units] on a field expedition to determine whether or not the dominant species here possesses the Synapse known to our [catalog] as Beta sub Sixteen, the master [computer] [at home] having concluded

[1] *Translator's note: Despite the acknowledged fact that the translator is an expert on extra-terrestrial language, culture, philosophy, and the theory and design of xenological devices, the reader's indulgence is requested in this instance. To go into detail about these machines and the nature and modes of communication of the beings that operate them would be like writing the story of a young lover on the way to his reward, springing up his beloved's front steps, ringing the bell — and then stopping to present explicit detail about circuitous wiring and dry, dry cells. It is deemed more direct and more economical to use loose and convenient translations and to indicate them by brackets, in order to confine the narrative to the subject at hand. Besides, it pleases the translator's modesty to be so sparing with his [omniscience].*

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that without the Synapse, this Earth culture must become extinct. Needless to [say] [we] are here to observe and not to interfere; to add to the [memory-banks] of the master [computer] only, it being a matter of no significance otherwise.

On arrival [we] set up the usual [detectors], expecting to get our information in a [expression of very short time-unit] or so; but to our [great astonishment] the readings on the [kickshaw], the [gimmick] and our high-sensitivity [snivvy] were mixed; it appeared that this culture possessed the Synapse but did not use it. [! ! !]

[We] therefore decided to conduct a [microcosmic] observation on each of the specimens in a small group, under [laboratory] conditions, to discover to what extent the Synapse exists in them, and under what circumstances it might become functional.

We have set up for this purpose [the analog of] a [ ], or [residence], called, in Terrestrial terms, *small town boarding house*, and have attracted to it:

PHILIP HALVORSEN, a young vocational guidance expert, who has a ceaselessly active analytical mind, and a kind of instinct for illogic: he knows when a person or situation is, in some way, wrong, and will not rest until he finds out why. He has recently followed his own logic to the conclusion that he wants to be dead—and he can't find out why! . . . MARY HAUNT, a beautiful girl who claims to be twenty-two (and lies), and who wants to be a movie star with an ambition transcending all reason. She is employed in a very minor capacity at the local radio station, and is always angry at everyone. . . . ANTHONY DUNGLASS O'BANION, young lawyer, deeply convinced that his family background, "breeding," "culture" and occupation set him apart from everyone else in town; he is desperately fighting a growing conviction that he is in love with . . . SUE MARTIN, young widowed night-club hostess (whom O'Banion's Mother, if she were here, would certainly refer to as a "woman of that sort"). Sue Martin, a woman of unusual equilibrium, loves O'Banion but will not submit herself to his snobbery and therefore keeps her feelings very much to herself. . . . Her young son ROBIN, who is three, and is friends with everyone everywhere including his invisible, "imaginary" playmates Boff and Googie. Robin's special friend is the lawyer O'Banion; they get along very well indeed. . . . Finally, MISS SCHMIDT, the high-school librarian, who is a soft-voiced, timid little rabbit of a woman, afraid of the world and abjectly obedient to propriety.

The retired couple who run the boarding house are SAM and BITTY BITTELMAN, wise, relaxed, helpful, observant. They are available always except for one day a month when they go out "for a ride."

That, in Terrestrial terms, is [our] laboratory setup. [We] installed a [widget] and [rigged-up] a [wadget] as complementary [observation-and-

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control] even though it meant using a [miserable] [inefficient] [old-fashioned] power supply on the [wadget], which has to be re[charged] every [equivalent of Earth month]. Everything proceeded satisfactorily until [Smith], plagued by what [I] can only, in the most cosmic breadth of generosity, call an excess of enthusiasm, insisted that [we] speed up our research by stimulating the Synapse in these specimens. In spite of [my] warnings and [my] caution, [he] [bulled] ahead giving [me] no choice but to assist [him] in re[wiring] the [machines] for this purpose. But let it be on the [record] that [I] specifically warned [him] of the dangers of revealing [our] presence here. [I] for [one] dread the idea of being responsible for the destruction of organized life. Even if only one of the specimens should detect [us], there is so much intercommunication in this small group that it would be virtually impossible to remove or destroy one without alerting and disturbing all. The least effect would be to negate all [our] efforts so far; the most is something [I] cannot [ethically] live with.

Under these [unhappy] circumstances [we] proceeded with the stimulation: Old Sam Bittelman went to Miss Schmidt's room when she reported her venetian blind broken and unable to close. She suddenly found it impossible not to answer Sam's questions, which probed at the very roots of her timidity. Shocked to these roots, but more thoughtful than she had ever been in her life before, she went to bed forgetting the blind and thinking about the fact that her conditioning to keep her body covered was more deeply instilled into her than *Thou shalt not kill*—and other, equally unsettling concepts.

Mary Haunt overslept, for the very first time, and went into the kitchen, furious. Sam and Bitty were there, and suddenly the girl *had* to answer the questions they shot at her. She escaped quickly, but spent the rest of the day in bed, miserable and disoriented, wondering if, after all, she did want Hollywood. . . .

Anthony O'Banion went down to the night club where Sue Martin worked, and sat out of sight on the balcony. Suddenly Sam Bittelman was at the table with him, asking him deeply troubling questions about the law and why he practiced it, about his convictions of blood and breeding, and about his feelings for Sue Martin. Dizzied and speechless, O'Banion was led home by kind old Sam.

Bitty found Sue Martin alone in her room one morning, and asked her some pointed questions, all of which Sue answered with ease, quite undisturbed, quite willing. Yes, she loved O'Banion. No, she wouldn't do anything about it; that was O'Banion's problem. Sue Martin was no trouble at all to Bitty. . . .

Late one hot evening Halvorsen walked into the kitchen with a gun in his hand, saying there was something wrong, something he couldn't name . . . but "Who are you and

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what do you want?" Bitty calmly asked him why he had bought a gun: "It was for yourself, wasn't it, Philip? *Why do you want to be dead?"*

[I] submit that [Smith] is guilty of carelessness and [unethical] conduct. [I] see no solution but to destroy this specimen and perhaps the others. [I] declare that this situation has arisen only because [Smith] ignored [my] clearly [stated] warning. As [I] [write], this alerted, frightened specimen stands ready to commit violence on [our] [equipment] and thereby itself. [I] hereby serve notice on [Smith] that [he] got [us] into this and [he] can [ ]ing well get [us] out.

IX

"*Why do you want to be dead?*"

Phil Halvorsen stood gaping at the old woman, and the gun, still shrouded in its silly paper bag, began whispering softly as he trembled. The butt fitted his hand as his hand fitted the butt; *It's holding me*, he thought hysterically, knowing clearly that his hysteria was a cloud, a cloak, a defense against that which he was not equipped to think about . . . well, maybe not ready to think about; but how had she known?

For nearly two days he had been worrying and gnawing at this sense of wrongness about him. Back and back he would come to it, only to reach bafflement and kick it away angrily; not eating enough, hardly sleeping at all; *let me sleep first!* something wailed within him, and as he sensed it he kicked it away again: more hysteria, not letting him think. And then a word from O'Banion, a phrase from Miss Schmidt, and his own ragbag memory: The Bittelmans never said — they always asked. It was as if they could reach into a man's mind, piece together questions from the unused lumber stored there, and from it build shapes he couldn't bear to look at. *How many terrible questions have I locked away?* And has she broken the lock? He said, "Don't . . . ask me that . . . why did you ask me that?"

"Well, why ever not?"

"You're a . . . you can read my mind."

"Can I?"

"*Say* something!" he shouted. The paper bag stopped whispering. He thought she noticed it.

"Am I reading your mind," she asked reasonably, "if I see you walk in here the way you did looking like the wrath o' God, holding that thing out in front of you and shying away from it at the same time, and then tell you that if you accidentally pull the trigger you might have to die for it? Read minds? Isn't it enough to read the papers?"

Oh, he thought. . . . Oh-h. He looked at her sharply. She was quite calm, waiting, leaving it to him. He knew, suddenly and certainly, that this woman could outthink him, outtalk him, seven ways from Sunday without turning a hair. This meant either that he was completely and embarrassingly wrong, or that her easy explanations weren't true ones

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. . . which was the thing that had been bothering him in the first place. "Why did you say I bought the gun for something else?" he snapped.

She gave him that brief, very warm smile. "Didn't say; I asked you, right? How could I really know?"

For one further moment he hesitated, and it came to him that if this flickering doubt about her was justified, the chances were that a gun would be as ineffective as an argument. And besides . . . it was like a silent current in the room, a sort of almost-sound, or the aural pressure he could feel sometimes when a car was braking near him; but here it came out feeling like comfort.

He let the bag fall until it swung from its mouth. He twisted it closed. "Will you — I mean," he bumbled, "I don't want it."

"Now what would I do with a gun?" she asked.

"I don't know. I just don't want it around. I can't throw it away. I don't want to have anything to do with it. I thought maybe you could put it away somewhere."

"You know, you'd better sit down," said Bitty. She didn't exactly push him but he had to move back to get out of her way as she approached, and when the back of his knees hit a chair he had to sit down or fall down. Bitty continued across the kitchen, opened a high cupboard and put the bag on the topmost shelf. "Only place in the house Robin can't climb into."

"Robin. Oh yes," he said, seeing the possibilities. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry."

"You'd better talk it out, Philip," she said in her flat, kind way. "You're fixing to bust wide open. I won't have you messing up my kitchen."

"There's nothing to talk about."

She paused on her way back to the sink, in a strange hesitation like one listening. Suddenly she turned and sat down at the table with him. "What did you want with a gun, Philip?" she demanded; and just as abruptly, he answered her, as if she had hurled something at him and it had bounced straight back into her waiting hands, "I was thinking about killing myself."

If he thought this would elicit surprise, or an exclamation, or any more questions, he was disappointed. She seemed only to be waiting, so he said, with considerably more care, "I don't know why I told you that but it came out right. I said I was thinking about doing it. I didn't say I was going to do it." He looked at her. Not enough? Okay then: "I couldn't be sure exactly what I was thinking until I bought a gun. Does that make any sense to you?"

"Why not?"

"I don't ever know exactly what I think unless I try it out. Or get all the pieces laid out ready to try."

"Or tell somebody?"

"I couldn't tell anybody about this."

"Did you try?"

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"*Damn* it!" It was a whisper, but it emerged under frightening pressure. Then normally, "I'm sorry, Bitty, I'm real sorry. I suddenly got mad at the language, you know what I mean? You say something in words of one syllable and it comes out meaning something you never meant. I told you, 'I couldn't tell anybody about this.' That sounds as if I knew all about it and was just shy or something. So you ask me, 'Did you try?' But what I really mean was that this whole thing, everything about it, is a bunch of — of feelings and — well, crazy ideas *that I couldn't tell anyone about.*"

Bitty's rare smile flickered. "Did you try?"

"Well I'll be. You're worse than ever," he said, this time without anger. "You *do* know what I'm thinking."

"So what were you thinking?"

He sobered immediately. "Things . . . all crazy. I think all the time, Bitty, like a radio was playing all day, all night, and I can't turn it off. Wouldn't want to; wouldn't know how to live without it. Ask me is it going to rain and off I go, thinking about rain, where it comes from, about clouds, how many different kinds there are; about air-currents and jet-streams and everything else you pick up reading those little paragraphs at the bottom of newspaper columns; about —"

"About why you bought a gun?"

"Huh? Oh . . . all right, all right, I won't ramble." He closed his eyes to hear his thoughts, and frowned at them. "Anyway, at the tail end of these run-downs is always some single thing that stops the chain — for the time. It might be the answer to some question I asked myself, or someone asks me, or it might just be as far as the things I know will take me.

"So one day a few weeks ago I got to thinking about guns, and never mind the way I went, but what I arrived at was the idea of a gun killing me, and then just the idea of being dead. And the more I thought, the more scared I got."

After waiting what seemed to be long enough, Bitty said, "Scared."

"It wasn't kil — being dead that scared me. It was the feeling I had about it. I was glad about it. I wanted it. That's what scared me."

"Why do you want to be dead?"

"That's what I don't know." His voice fell. "Don't know, I just don't know," he mumbled. "So I couldn't get it out of my head and I couldn't make any sense out of it, and I thought the only thing I could do was to get a gun and load it and — get everything ready, to see how I felt then." He looked up at her. "That sounds real crazy, I bet."

Bitty shrugged. Either she denied the statement or it didn't matter. Halvorsen looked down again and said to his clenched hands, "I sat there in my room with the muzzle in my mouth and all the safeties off, and hooked my thumb around the trigger."

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"Learn anything?"

His mouth moved but he couldn't find words to fit the movement. "Well," said Bitty sharply, "why didn't you pull it?"

"I just —" He closed his eyes in one of those long, inward-reading pauses. "—couldn't. I mean, *didn't*. I wasn't afraid, if that's what you want to know." He glanced at her and couldn't tell what she wanted to know. "Sitting there, that way, I came to realize that this wasn't the way it should happen," he said with some difficulty.

"What is the way?"

"Like this: if ever there was an earthquake, or I looked up and saw a safe falling on me, or some other thing like that, something from outside myself — I wouldn't move aside. I'd let it happen."

"Is there a difference between that and shooting yourself?"

"Yes!" he said, with more animation than he had shown so far. "Put it like this: there's part of me that's dead, and wants the rest of me dead. There's part of me that's alive, and wants all of me alive." He looked that over and nodded at it. "My hand, my arm, my thumb on the trigger — they're alive. All the live parts of me want to help me go on living, d'you see? No live part should help the dead part get what it wants. The way it'll happen, the way it should happen, is not when I do something to make it happen. It'll be when I don't do something. I won't get out of the way, and that's it, and thanks for keeping the gun for me, it's no use to me." He stood up and found his eyes locked with hers, and sat right down again, breathing hard.

"Why do you want to be dead?" she asked flatly.

He put his head down on his hands and began to rock it slowly to and fro.

"Don't you want to know?"

Muffled, his voice came up from the edge of the table. "No." Abruptly he sat up, staring. "No? What made me say no? Bitty," he demanded, "what made me say that?"

She shrugged. He jumped up and began pacing swiftly up and down the kitchen. "I'll be dogged," he murmured once, and "Well, what d'ye kn —"

Bitty watched him, and catching him on a turn when their eyes could meet, she asked, "Well, — why do you want to —"

"Shut up," he said. He said it, not to her, but to any interruption. His figmentary signal-light, which indicated dissatisfaction, unrightness, was casting its glow all over his interior landscape. To be hounded half to death by something like this, then to discover that basically he didn't want to investigate it. . . . He sat down and faced her, his eyes alight. "I don't know yet," he said, "but I will, I will." He took a deep breath. "It's like being chased by something that's gaining on you, and you duck into an alley, and then

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you find it's blind, there's only a brick wall; so you sit down to wait, it's all you can do. And all of a sudden you find a door in the wall. Been there all the time. Just didn't look."

"Why do you want to be dead?"

"B-because I — I shouldn't be alive. Because the average guy — Different, that's what I am, different, unfit."

"Different, unfit." Bitty's eyebrows raised slightly. "They the same thing, Philip?"

"Well, sure."

"You can't jump like a kangaroo, you can't eat grass raw like a cow — different. You unfit because you can't do those things?"

He made an annoyed laugh. "Not that, not that. People, I mean."

"You can't fly a plane. You can't sing like Sue Martin. You can't spout law like Tony O'Banion. That kind of different?"

"No," he said, and in a surge of anguish, "No, no! I can't talk about it, Bitty!" He looked at her and again saw that rare, deep smile. He answered it in kind, but weakly, remembering that he had said that to her before. "This time I mean I can't talk about such things to you. To a lady," he said in abrupt, unbearable confusion.

"I'm no lady," said Bitty with conviction. Suddenly she punched his forearm; he thought it was the first time she had ever touched him. "To you I'm not even a human being. Not even another person. I mean it," she said warmly. "Have I asked you a single question you couldn't've asked yourself? Have I told you anything you didn't know?"

His peculiar linear mind cast rapidly back and up again. He felt an odd instant of disorientation. It was not unpleasant. Bitty said gently, "Go on talking to yourself, boy. Who knows — you might find yourself in good company."

"Aw . . . thanks, Bitty," he mumbled. His eyes stung and he shook his head. "All right, all *right*, then . . . it just came to me, one big flash, and I guess I couldn't sit here — here," he said, waving his arm to include the scrubbed, friendly kitchen, "and look at you, and think about these — uh this — all at once." He swallowed heavily. "Well, that time I told you about, that day I found out I wanted to be dead, it was like getting hit on the head. Right after that, only a couple of minutes, I got hit on the head just as hard by something else. I didn't know — want to know till now that they were connected, some way." He closed his eyes. "It was a theater, that rathole down across the Circle. You know. It — it hit out at me when I wasn't looking. It was all covered with . . . pictures and — and it said SEE this and SEE that and SEE some dirty other thing, adults only, you know what I mean." He opened his eyes to see what Bitty was doing, but Bitty was doing nothing at all. Waiting. He turned his face away from her, and

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said indistinctly into his shoulder, "All my life those things meant nothing to me. *There!*" he shouted, "you see? Different, different!"

But she wouldn't see. Or she wouldn't see until he did, himself, more clearly. She still waited.

He said, "Down at work, there's a fellow, Scodie. This Scodie, he's a good man, really can turn out a day's work. I mean, he likes what he's doing, he cares. Except every time a girl goes by, everything stops. He snaps up out of what he's doing, he watches her. I mean, *every* time. It's like he can't help himself. He does it the way a cadet salutes an officer on the street. He does it like that crossing-guard on the toy train, that pops out of his little house every time his little light goes on. He watches until the girl's gone by, and then he says 'mmm*yuh!*' and looks over at me and winks."

"What do you do, every time?"

"Well, I—" He laughed uncertainly. "I guess I wink back at him and I say, mm-*hm!* But I know why I do it, it's because he expects me to; he'd think it was sort of peculiar if I didn't. But he doesn't do it for me; I don't expect anything of him one way or the other. He does it—" Words failed him, and he tried again. "Doing that, he's part of—everybody. What he does is the same thing every song on every radio says every minute. Every ad in every magazine does it if it possibly can, even if it means a girl in her underwear with stillson wrenches for sale." He leapt to his feet and began to pace excitedly. "You got to back off a little to see it," he told Bitty, who smiled behind his back. "You got to look at the whole thing all at once, to see how *much* there is of it, the jokes people tell—yeah, you got to laugh at them, whatever, you even have to know a couple, or they'll . . . The window displays, the television, the movies . . . somebody's writing an article about transistors or termites or something, and every once in a while he figures he's been away from it long enough and he has to say something about the birds and the bees and 'Gentlemen prefer.' Everywhere you turn the whole world's at it, chipping and chipping away at it—"

He stamped back to the table and looked into Bitty's face intently. "You got to back away and look at it all at once," he cautioned again. "I'm not in kindergarten, I know what it's all about. I'm not a woman-hater. I've been in love. I'll get married, some day. Go ahead and tell me I'm talking about one of the biggest, strongest, down-deep urges we have—I'll buy that. That's what I *mean*, that's what I'm *talking* about." His forehead was pink and shiny; he took out a crumpled handkerchief and batted at it. "So *much* of it, all around you, all the time, filling a big hungry need in average people. I don't mean the urge itself; I mean all this *reminding*, this what do you call it, indoctrination. It's a

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need or folks wouldn't stand for so much of it, comic books, lipstick, that air-jet in the floor at the funny-house at the Fair." He thumped into his chair, panting. "Do you begin to see what I mean about '*different*'?"

"Do you?" asked Bitty, but Halvorsen didn't hear her; he was talking again. "Different, because I don't feel that hunger to be reminded, I don't need all that high-pressure salesmanship, I don't want it. Every time I tell one of my jokes, every time I wink back at old Scodie, I feel like a fool, like some sort of a liar. But you got to protect yourself; you can't ever let anyone find out. You know why? Because the average guy, the guy-by-the-millions that needs all that noise so much, he'll let you be the way he is, or he'll let you be . . . I'm sorry, Bitty. Don't make me go into a lot of dirty details. You see what I mean, don't you?"

"What do you mean?"

Irritated, he blew a single sharp blast from his nostrils. "Well, what I mean is, they'll let you be the way they are, or you have to be . . . sick, crippled. You can't be anything else! You can't be Phil Halvorsen who isn't sick and who isn't crippled but who just doesn't naturally go around banging his antlers against the rocks so the whole world can hear it."

"So — that's what you mean by unfit?"

"That's why I wanted to be dead. I just don't think the way other people do; if I act the way other people do I feel . . . feel guilty. I guess I had this piling up in me for years, and that day with the guns, when I found out what I wanted to do . . . and then that theater-front, yawping over me like a wet mouth full of dirty teeth . . ." He giggled foolishly. "Listen to me, will you . . . Bitty, I'm sorry."

She utterly ignored this. "High-pressure salesmanship," she said.

"What?"

"You said it, I didn't. . . . Isn't hunger one of those big deep needs, Philip? Suppose you had a bunch of folks starving on an island and dropped them a ton of food — would they need high-pressure salesmanship?"

It was as if he stood at the edge of a bottomless hole — more, the very outer edge of the world, so close his very toes projected over the emptiness. It filled him with wonder; he was startled, but not really afraid, because it might well be that to fall down and down into that endless place might be a very peaceful thing. He closed his eyes and slowly, very slowly, came back to reality, the kitchen, Bitty, Bitty's words. "You mean . . . the av — the ordin — you mean, people aren't really interested?"

"Not that interested."

He blinked; he felt as if he had ceased to exist in his world and had been plunked down in a very similar, but totally new one. It was far less lonely here.

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He hit the table and laughed into Bitty's calm face. "I'm going to sleep," he said, and got up; and he knew she had caught his exact shade of meaning when she said gently, "Sure you can."

EXCERPT FROM FIELD EXPEDITION [NOTEBOOK]

[I] had thought up to now that in [Smith]'s [immorally] excessive enthusiasm and [bullheadedness] [I] had encountered the utmost in [irritants]. [I] was in [error]; [he] now surpasses these, and without effort. In the first place, having placated and outwitted the alerted specimen, [he] has destroyed [my] preliminary detailed [report] on him; this is [irritat]ing not only because it was done without consulting [me], not only because of the trouble [I] went to to [write] it all up, but mostly because [he] is technically within [his] [ethics-rights]—the emergency created by [his] [bumbling mismanagement] no longer exists. [I] have [force]fully pointed out to [him] that it was only by the application of [my] kind of cautious resourcefulness that [he] succeeded, but [he] just [gloats]. [I] [most strongly affirm-and-bind-myself], the instant [we] get back home and are released from Expeditionary [ethic-discipline], [I] shall [bend] [his] [ ]s over [his] [ ] and [tie a knot in] them.

[We] have now, no [credit-thanks] to [Smith], reached a point where all our specimens are in a state of [heavy] preconditioning of their unaccountably random Synapse Beta sub Sixteen. Being a synapse, it will of course come into full operation only on a reflexive level and in an extreme emergency, which [we] are now setting up.

Unless [Smith] produces yet more [stupidities], the specimens should live through this.

X

It had become impossibly hot, and very still. Leaves dropped at impossible angles, and still the dust lay on them. Sounds seemed too enervated to travel very far. The sky was brass all day, and at night, for want of ambition, the overcast was no more than a gauzy hood of haze.

It was the Bittelman's "day off" again, and without them the spine had been snatched out of the household. The boarders ate pokily, lightly, at random, and somehow got through the time when there was nothing to do but sit up late enough to get tired enough to get whatever rest the temperature would permit. It was too hot, even, to talk, and no one attempted it. They drifted to their rooms to wait for sleep; they slumped in front of fans and took cold showers which generated more heat than they dissipated. When at last darkness came, it was a relief only to the eyes. The household pulse beat slowly and slower; by eight o'clock it was library-quiet, by nine quite silent, so that the soft brushing of knuckles on Miss Schmidt's door struck her like a shout.

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"Wh-who is it?" she quavered, when she recovered her breath.

"Sue."

"Oh — oh. Oh, do come in." She pulled the damp sheet tight up against her throat.

"Oh, you're in bed already. I'm sorry."

"*I'm* sorry. It's all right."

Sue Martin swung the door shut and came all the way in. She was wearing an off-the-shoulder peasant blouse and a pleated skirt with three times more filmy nylon in it than one would guess until she turned, when it drifted like smoke. "My," said Miss Schmidt enviously. "You look cool."

"State of mind," Sue smiled. "I'm about to go to work and I wish I didn't have to."

"And Bitty's out. I'm honorary baby-sitter again."

"You're an angel."

"No, oh, no!" cried Miss Schmidt. "I wish everything I had to do was that easy. Why, in all the time I've known you, every time I've done it, I — I've had nothing to do!"

"He sleeps pretty soundly. Clear conscience, I guess."

"I think it's because he's happy. He smiles when he sleeps."

"Smiles? Sometimes he laughs out loud," said Sue Martin. "I was a little worried tonight, for a while. He was so flushed and wide-awake —"

"Well, it's *hot*."

"It wasn't that." Sue chuckled. "His precious Boff was all over the place, 'fixin' things,' Robin said What he was fixing all over the walls and ceiling, Robin didn't say. Whatever it was, it's finished now, though, and Robin's sound asleep. I'm sure you won't even have to go in. And Bitty ought to be home soon."

"You'll leave your door open?"

Sue Martin nodded and glanced up at the large open transom over Miss Schmidt's door. "You'll hear him if he so much as blinks. . . . I've got to run. Thanks *so* much."

"Oh, really, Mrs. M — uh, Sue. Don't thank me. Just run along."

"Good night."

Sue Martin slipped out, silently closing the door behind her. Miss Schmidt sighed and looked up at the transom. After Sue's light footsteps had faded away, she listened, listened as hard as she could, trying to pour part of herself through the transom, across the hall, through Sue Martin's open door. A light sleeper at any time, she knew confidently that she was on guard now and would wake if anything happened. If she slept at all in this sticky heat.

She might sleep, at that, she thought after a while. She shifted herself luxuriously, and edged to a slightly cooler spot on the bed. "That wicked Sam," she murmured, and blushed in the dark. But he had been right. A *nightgown* in weather like this?

Suddenly, she slept.

In O'Banion's room, there was a soft sound. He had put off taking a

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shower until suddenly he had used up his energy, and could hardly stir. I'll just rest my eyes, he thought, and bowed his head. The soft sound was made by his forehead striking the book.

Hälvorsen lay rigid on his bed, staring at the ceiling. There, almost as if it was projected, was the image of a flimsy cylinder vomiting smoke. Go ahead, he thought, detachedly. Or go away. I don't care which. Before I talked to Bitty, I wanted you. Now, I don't care. Is that better? He closed his eyes, but the image was still there. He lay very quietly, watching the insides of his eyelids. It was like being asleep. When he was asleep the thing was there too.

Mary Haunt sat by her window, pretending it was cooler there than in bed. There was no anger in her, just now as she lay back and dreamed. The Big Break, the pillars of light at her première, her name two stories tall, over a Broadway marquee — these had no place in this particular favorite dream. I'll do over Mom's room, she thought, dimity, this time, and full, full skirts on the vanity and the night table. She closed her eyes, putting herself in Mom's room with such vividness that she could almost smell the cool faint odor of lavender sachets and the special freshness of sheets dried in the sun. Yes, and something else, outside the room, barely, just barely she knew bread was baking, so that the kitchen would be heavenly with it; the bread would dominate the spice-shelf for a while, until it was out of the oven and cooled. "Oh, Mom . . ." she whispered. She lay still in her easy-chair, holding and holding to the vision until this room, this house, this town didn't matter any more.

Some hours went by.

Robin floated in a luminous ocean of sleep where there was nothing to fear and where, if he just turned to look, there were love and laughter waiting for him. His left hand uncurled and he thrust the second and third fingers together into his mouth. Somehow he was a big bulldozer with a motor that sounded like Mitster and tracks that clattered along like Coffeepot, and Boff and Googie were riding along with him and laughing. Then without effort he was a glittery ferris-wheel, but he could watch himself too in one of the cars, screaming his delight and leaning against Tonio's hard arm. All this, yet he was still afloat in that deep bright place where there was no fear, where love and laughter hid around some indescribable corner, waiting. Bright, brighter. Warm, warm, warmer . . . oh, hot, *hot!*

XI

Miss Schmidt opened her eyes to an impossible orange glare and a roar like the end of the world. For one full second she lay still, paralyzed by an utter disbelief; no light could have become so bright, no sound

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could have risen to this volume, without waking her as it began. Then she found a way to focus her eyes against that radiance, and saw the flames, and in what was left to her of her immobile second, she explained the whole thing to herself and said relievedly, of course, of course: it's only a nightmare and *suppose there's a fire?* — and that's so *silly,* Sam —

And then she was out of bed in a single bound, standing in the center of the room, face to flaming face with reality. Everything was burning — everything! The drapes had already gone and the slats of the venetian blind, their cords gone, were heaped on the floor, going like a campfire. Even as she watched the screen sagged and crumpled, its pine frame glaring and spitting pitch through blistering paint. It fell outside.

Outside, outside! The window's open, you're on the ground floor; yes, and there on the chair, not burning yet, your bathrobe; take the robe and jump, quick!

Then, beyond belief, there was a sound louder than the earth-filling roar, and different; fine hot powder and a hot hail of plaster showered on her shoulders; she looked up to see the main beam, right over her head, sag toward her and hang groaning, one part reaching to the other with broken flat fingers of splintered wood which gloved themselves in flame as she saw them. She cowered, and just then the handle of the door turned and a gout of smoke slammed it open and whisked out of sight in the updraft; and there in the hall stood Robin, grinding a fat little fist into one abruptly wakened eye. She could see his lips move, though she could hear nothing in this mighty bellow of sound. She knew it, though, and heard it clearly in her mind: "What's 'at noice?"

The beam overhead grumbled and again she was showered with plaster. She batted it off her shoulders, and whimpered. A great flame must have burst from the roof above her just then, for through the window she saw a brilliant glare reflected from the white clapboards of the garage wall outside. The glare tugged at her — *jump!* — and besides, her robe . . .

The beam thundered and began to fall. Now she must make a choice, in microseconds. The swiftest thought would not be fast enough to weigh and consider and decide; all that could matter now was what was inside her, throwing switches (some so worn and easy to move!). A giant was throwing them, and he was strong; his strength was a conditioning deeper than *thou shalt not kill;* he was a lesson learned before she had learned to love God, or to walk, or to talk. He was her mother's authority and the fear of all the hairy, sweaty, dangerous mysteries from which she had shielded herself all her life; and his name and title were Cover Thyself! With him,

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helping him, was the reflexive Save Thyself! and against these — Robin, whom she loved (but love is what she felt, once, for a canary, and once for a Raggedy Ann doll) and her sense of duty to Sue Martin (but so lightly promised, and at the time such a meaningless formality). There could be no choice in such a battle, though she must live with the consequences for all her years.

Then —

— it was as if a mighty voice had called *Stop!*, and the very flames froze. Half a foot above her hung the jagged end of the burning beam, and chunks of plaster, splinters and scraps of shattered lath and glowing joist stopped in midair. Yet during this sliver of a fraction of time, she knew that the phenomenon was a mental something, a figment, and the idea of time-cessation only a clumsy effort of her mind's to account for what was happening.

Save Thyself was still there, hysterical hands clutching for the controls, but *Cover Thyself* disappeared into the background. Save herself she would, but it would be on new terms. She was in the grip of a reflex of reflexes, one which took into consideration all the factors a normal reflex would, to the end goal of survival. But along with these, it called up everything Reta Schmidt had ever done, everything she had been. In a single soundless flash, a new kind of light was thrown into every crevice and cranny of her existence. It was her total self now, reacting to a total situation far wider than that which obtained here in this burning room. It illuminated even the future — that much of it which depended upon these events, between them and the next probable major "crossroads." It canceled past misjudgments and illogics and replaced them with rightness, even for the times she had known what was right and had done otherwise. It came and was gone even while she leaped, while she took two bounding steps across the floor and the beam crashed and crushed and showered sparks where she had been standing.

She scooped up the child and ran down the hall, through the foyer, into the kitchen. It was dark there, thick with swirling smoke, but the glass panels on the kitchen door glared with some unfamiliar light from outdoors. She began to cough violently, but grimly aimed at that light and drove ahead. It was eclipsed suddenly by a monstrous shadow, and suddenly it exploded inward. There were lights out there she had never seen before, and half-silhouetted in the broken doorway was a big man with a gleaming helmet and an axe. She tried to call, or perhaps it was only a scream, but instead she went into a spasm of coughing.

"Somebody in here?" asked the man. A beam of light, apparently from the street, lit up the shield on the front of his helmet as he leaned

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forward. He stepped inside. "Whew! Where are you?"

She went blindly to him and pushed Robin against his coat. "The baby," she croaked. "Get him out of this smoke."

He grunted and suddenly Robin was gone from her arms. "You all right?" He was peering into the black and the smoke.

"Take him out," she said. "Then I'll want your coat."

He went out. Miss Schmidt could hear Robin's clear voice: "You a fireman?"

"I sure am," rumbled the man. "Want to see my fire engine? Then sit right there on the grass and wait one second. Okay?"

"Okay."

The coat flew through the doorway.

"Got it?"

"Thank you." She put the huge garment on and went out. The fireman waited there, again holding Robin in his arms. "You all right, ma'am?"

Her lungs were an agony and she had burns on her feet and shoulders. Her hair was singed and one of her hands was flayed across its back. "I'm just fine," she said.

They began to walk up the road. Robin squirmed around in the man's arms and popped his head out to look back at the brightly burning house.

" 'By, Boff," he said happily, and then gave his heart to the fire engine.

XII

"*Mother, the bread's burning!*"

Mary Haunt opened her eyes to an impossible glare and a great roaring. She shrieked and flailed out blindly, as if she could frighten it away, whatever it was; and then she came enough to her senses to realize that she still sat in her chair by the window, and that the house was on fire. She leaped to her feet, sending the heavy chair skittering across the room where it toppled over against the clothespress. As it always did when it was bumped, the clothespress calmly opened its doors.

But Mary Haunt didn't wait for that or anything else. She struck the screen with the flat of her hand. It popped out easily, and she hit the ground almost at the same time as it did. She ran off a few steps, and then, like Lot's wife, curiosity overtook her and she stopped. She turned around in fascination.

Great wavering flames leapt fifty and sixty feet in the air and all the windows were alight. From the town side she could hear the shriek and clang of fire engines, and windows and doors opening, and running feet. But the biggest sound of all was the roar of the fire, like a giant's blowtorch.

She looked back at her own window. She could see into the room easily, the chair on its side, the bed with its chenille top-spread sprouting measles of spark and char,

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and the gaping doors of the— "My clothes! My clothes!"

Furiously she ran back to the window, paused a moment in horror to see fire run along the picture-molding of the inside wall like a nightmare caterpillar. "My clothes," she whispered. She didn't make much money at her job, but every cent that wasn't used in bed and board went on her back. She mouthed something, and from her throat came that animal growl of hers; she put both hands on the sill and leaped, and tumbled back into the house.

She was prepared for the heat but not for that intensity of light, and the noise was worst of all. She recoiled from it and stood for a moment with her hands over her eyes, swaying with the impact of it. Then she ground her teeth and made her way across to the clothespress. She swept open the bottom drawer and turned out the neatly folded clothes. Down at the bottom was a cotton print dress, wrapped carefully around a picture frame. She lifted it out and hugged it, and ran across to the window with it. She leaned far out and dropped it gently on the grass, then turned back in again.

The far wall, by the door, began to buckle high up, and suddenly there was fire up there. The corner near the ceiling toppled into the room with a crash and a cloud of white dust and greasy-looking smoke, and then the whole wall fell, not toward her, but away, so that her room now included a section of the corridor outside. As the dust settled somebody, a man, came roaring inarticulately and battering through the rubble. She could not know who it was. He apparently meant to travel the corridor whether it was all there or not, and he did, disappearing again into the inferno.

She staggered back toward the clothespress. She felt mad, drunk, crazy. Maybe it was the de-oxygenated atmosphere and maybe it was fear and reaction, but it was sort of wonderful, too; she felt her face writhing and part of her was numb with astonishment at what the rest of her was doing: she was laughing. She slammed into the clothespress, gasping for breath, filled her lungs and delivered up a shrill peal of laughter. Almost helpless from it, she fumbled down a dull satin evening gown with a long silver sash. She held it up in front of her and laughed again, doubling over it, and then straightened up, rolling the dress up into a ball as she did so. With all her might she hurled it into the rubble of the hallway. Next was a simple black dress with no back and a little bolero; with an expression on her face that can only be described as cheerful, she threw it after the evening gown. Then the blue, and the organdy with the taffeta underskirt, and the black and orange one she used to call her Hallowe'en dress; each one she dragged out, held up, and hurled: "You,"

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she growled between her convulsions of laughter, "you, and you, and *you*." When the press was empty, she ran to the bureau and snatched open her scarf drawer, uncovering a flowerbed of dainty, filmy silk and nylon and satin shawls, scarves, and kerchiefs. She whipped out an oversized babushka, barely heavier than the air that floated it, and ran with it to the flaming mass where her door once was. She dipped and turned like a dancer, fluttering it through flame, and when it was burning she bounded back to the bureau and put it in the drawer with the others. Fire streamed out of the drawer and she laughed and laughed . . .

And something nipped her sharply on the calves; she yelped and turned and found the lace of her black negligee was on fire. She twisted back and gathered the cloth and ripped it away. The pain had sobered her and she was bewildered now, weak and beginning to be frightened. She started for the window and tripped and fell heavily, and when she got up the smoke was suddenly like a scalding blanket over her head and shoulders and she didn't know which way to go. She knelt and peered and found the window in an unexpected direction, and made for it. As she tumbled through, the ceiling behind her fell, and the roof after it.

On her belly she clawed away from the house, sobbing, and at last rose to her knees. She smelt of smoke and burned hair and all her lovely fingernails were broken. She squatted on the ground, staring at the flaming shell of the house, and cried like a little girl. But when her swollen eyes rested on that square patch in the grass, she stopped crying and got up and limped over to it. Her cotton print, and the picture . . . she picked the tidy package up and went tiredly away with it into the shadows where the hedge met the garage.

XIII

O'Banion raised his head groggily from the flyleaf of his *Blackstone* and the neat inscription written there:

The law doth punish man or woman
That steals the goose from off the common,
But let the greater felon loose,
That steals the common from the goose,

— a piece of Eighteenth Century japery which O'Banion deplored. However, it had been written there by Opdycke when he was in law school, and the Opdyckes were a darn fine family. Princeton people, of course, but nobody minded.

All this flickered through his mind as he swam up out of sleep, along with "What's the matter with my head?" because any roaring that loud must be in his ears; it would be too incredible anywhere else, and "What's the matter with the light?"

Then he was fully awake, and on his feet. "My *God!*"

He ran to the door and snatched

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it open. Flame squirted at him as if from a hose; in a split second he felt his eyebrows disappear. He yelled and staggered back from it, and it pursued him. He turned and dove out the window, landing clumsily on his stomach with his fists clenched over his solar plexus. His own weight drove the fists deep, and for a full minute he lay groaning for air. At last he got up, shook himself, and pelted around the house to the front. One fire engine was already standing by the curb. There was a police car and the knot of bug-eyed spectators who spring apparently out of the ground at the scene of any accident anywhere at any hour. At the far end of the Bittelman lot, there was a sharp scream of rubber and a glare of lights as a taxicab pulled in as close to the police barrier as it could get. The door was already open; a figure left it, half running, half thrown out by the sudden stop.

"*Sue!*" But no one heard him — everyone else was yelling too: "Look!" "Somebody stop her!" "Hey!" "Hey, you!"

O'Banion backed off a little to cup his hands and yell again, when directly over his head a cheerful small voice said, "Mommy runs *fast!*"

"Robin! You're all right —" He was perched on top of the fire engine with one arm around the shining brass bell, looking like a Boticelli seraph. Someone beside him — good heavens, it was Miss Schmidt, disheveled and bright-eyed, wrapped up in some tentlike garment — Miss Schmidt screamed, "Stop her, stop her, I've got the baby here!"

Robin said to Miss Schmidt, "Tonio runs fast too, shall we?"

Now they were all yelling at O'Banion, but in four paces he could hear nothing but the roar ahead of him. He had never seen a house burn like this, all over, all at once. He took the porch steps in one bound and had just time to turn his shoulder to the door. It was ajar, but couldn't swing fast enough under such an impact. It went down flat and slid, and for one crazy moment O'Banion was riding it like an aquaplane in a sea of fire, for the foyer floor was ablaze. Then the leading edge of the door caught on something and spilled him off. He rolled over twice in fuming débris and then got his feet under him. It was like a particularly bad dream, so familiar, so confusing. He turned completely around to orient himself, found the corridor, and started up it, yelling for Sue at the top of his voice. He saw a left-hand wall lean down toward him and had to scamper back out of the way. It had barely poured its rubble down when he was on, in, and through it. Over the crash and roar, over his own hoarse bellowing, he thought he heard a crazy woman laughing somewhere in the fire. Even in his near-hysteria, he could say, "Not Sue, that's not Sue Martin. . . ." And he was, before he knew it, at and past Sue Martin's

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room. He flung out a hand and caught the door-jamb, which immediately came off in his hand. He bounced off the end wall and turned as he did so, like a sprint swimmer, and swung into Sue Martin's room. "Sue! Sue!"

Was he mistaken? Did someone call, "Robin — Robin honey . . ."?

He dropped to his knees, where he could see in relatively clearer air. "Sue, oh Sue!"

She lay half-buried in rubble from the fallen ceiling. He threw off scorched and broken two-by-fours and burning lath, took her by the shoulders and lifted her out of the heap of broken plaster — thank the powers for that! it had protected her to some degree. "Sue?"

"Robin," she croaked.

He shook her. "He's all right, he's outside, I saw him."

She opened her eyes and frowned at him. Not at him; at what he had said. "He's here somewhere."

"I saw him. Come on!" He lifted her to her feet, and as she dragged, "It's the truth; do you think *I* would lie to you?"

He felt strength surge into her body. "You forgot to say, 'I, an O'Banion,' " she said, but it didn't hurt. They stumbled to the window and he pushed her through it and leaped after her. For two painful breaths they lay gulping clean air, and then O'Banion got to his feet. His head was spinning and he almost lay down again. He set his jaw and helped Sue Martin up. "Too close!" he shouted. Holding her up, he half-dragged her no more than a step when she suddenly straightened, and with unexpected and irresistible strength leapt back toward the burning wall, pulling him with her. He caught at her to regain his balance, and she put her arms tight around him. "The wall!" he screamed, as it leaned out over them. She said nothing, but her arms tightened even more, and he could have moved more easily if he had been bound to a post with steel chains. The wall came down then, thunder and sparks, like the end of the world; madly, it occurred to him just then that he could solve one of his problem cases by defining the unorthodox contract under suit as a stock certificate.

But instead of dying he took a stinging blow on his right shoulder, and that was all. He opened his eyes. He and Sue Martin still stood locked together, and all around them was flame like a flower-bed with the rough outline of the house wall and its peaked roof. Around their feet was the four-foot circular frame of the attic vent, which had ringed them like a quoit.

The woman slumped in his arms, and he lifted her and picked his way, staggering, into the friendly dark and the welcome hands of the firemen. But when they tried to lift her away from him she held his arm and would not let go. "Put me down, just put me down," she said. "I'm all right. Put me down."

They did and she leaned against

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O'Banion. He said, "We're okay now. We'll go up to the road. Don't mind about us." The firemen hesitated, but when they began to walk, they were apparently reassured, and ran back to their work. Hopeless work, O'Banion amended. But for a few sagging studs and the two chimneys, the house was little more than a pit of flames.

"Is Robin really —"

"Shh. He's really. Miss Schmidt got him out, I think. Anyway, he's sitting on the fire engine enjoying every minute. He watched you going in. He approves of your speed."

"You —"

"I saw you too. I yelled."

"And then you came after me." They walked a slow pace or so. "Why?"

Robin was safe, of course, he was about to say, so you didn't have to — and then there was within him a soundless white flash that lit up all he had ever done and been, everything he had read, people and places and ideas. Where he had acted right, he felt the right proven; where he had been wrong, he could see now the right in full force, even when for years he had justified his wrong. He saw fully now what old Sam Bittelman had almost convinced him of intellectually with his searching questions. He had fought away Sam's suggestion that there was something ludicrous, contradictory about the law and its pretensions to permanence. Now he saw that the law, as he knew it, was not under attack at all. As long as a man treated the body of law like a great stone buttress, based in bedrock and propping up civilization, he was fortifying a dead thing which could only kill the thing it was built to uphold. But if he saw civilization as an intricate, *moving* entity, the function of law changed. It was governor, stabilizer, inhibitor, *control* of something dynamic and progressive, subject to the punishments and privileges of evolution like a living thing. His whole idea of the hair-splitting search for "precedent" as a refining process in law was wrong. It was an adaptive process instead. The suggestion that not one single law is common to all human cultures, past and present, was suddenly no insult to law at all, but a living compliment; to nail a culture to permanent laws now seemed as ridiculous a concept as man conventionally refusing to shed his scales and his gills.

And with this revelation of the viability of man and his works, O'Banion experienced a profound realignment in his (or was it really his) attitude toward himself, his effortful preoccupation to defend and justify his blood and breeding and his gentleman's place in the world. It came to him now that although the law may say here that men are born equal, and there that they must receive equal treatment before the law, no one but a complete fool would insist that men *are* equal. Men, wherever they came from, whatever they claim for themselves,

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are only what's in their heads and what's in their hearts. The purest royal blood that yields a weak king will yield a failure; a strong peasant can rise higher and accomplish more, and if what he accomplishes is compatible with human good, he is surely no worse than a beneficent king. Over and above anything else, however, shone the fact that a good man needs least of all to prove it by claiming that he comes from a line of good men. And for him to assume the privileges and postures of the landed gentry after the land is gone is pure buffoonery. Time enough for sharp vertical differentiations between men when the differences become so great that the highest may not cross-breed with the lowest; until then, in the broad view, differences are so subtle as to be negligible, and the concept "to marry out of one's class" belongs with the genesis of hippogriffs and gryphons — in mythology.

All this, and a thousand times more, unfolded and was clear to O'Banion in this illuminated instant, so short it took virtually no time at all, so bright it lit up all the days of his past and part of his future as well. And it had happened between pace and pace, when Sue Martin said, "You followed me. Why?"

"I love you," he said instantly.

"Why?" she whispered.

He laughed joyously. "It doesn't matter."

Sue Martin — *Sue Martin!* — began to cry.

XIV

Phil Halvorsen opened his eyes and saw that the house was on fire. He lay still, watching the flames feed, and thought, isn't this what I was waiting for?

Now there can be an end to it, he thought peacefully. Now I never need worry again that I'm wrong to be as I am, and other people's needs, the appetites and rituals of the great Average will no longer accuse me. I cannot be excluded unless I exist, so here's an end to being excluded. I cannot be looked down on when I can no longer be seen.

The ceiling began to develop a tan patch, and hot white powder fell from it to his face. He covered it with the pillow. He was resigned to later, final agonies because they would be final, but he saw no reason to put up with the preliminaries. Just then most of the plaster came down on him. It didn't hurt much, and it meant the thing would be over sooner than he had thought.

He heard faintly, over the colossal roaring, a woman scream. He lay still. As much as anyone — perhaps more — he would ordinarily be concerned about the others. But not now. Not now. Such concern is for a man who expects to live with a conscience afterward.

Something — it sounded like an inside wall — went down very near. It jolted the foot of his bed and he felt its hot exhalation and the taste of its soot, but otherwise it did not

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reach him. "So come on," he said tightly, "get it over with, will you?" and hurled the pillow away.

As if in direct and obedient answer the ceiling over him opened up — *up;* apparently a beam had broken and was tipping down into an adjoining room, upward here. Then the tangle of stringers it carried fell away and started down. High above was blackness, suddenly rent by smoky orange light — the inside of the roof, a section of which was falling in with the stringers.

"All right," said Halvorsen, as if someone had asked him a question. He closed his eyes.

He closed his eyes on a flash of something like an inner and unearthly light, and time stood still . . . or perhaps it was only that subjectively he had all the time in the world to examine this shadowless internal cosmos.

Most immediately, it laid out before him the sequence of events which had brought him here, awaiting death on a burning bed. In this sequence a single term smote him with that "well, of *course!*" revelation that rewarded his plodding, directive thoughts when they were successful for him. The term was "Average," and his revelation came like a burst of laughter: for anyone else this would have been a truism, an inarguable axiom; like a fool he had let his convoluted thinking breeze past "Average," use "Average," worry about "Average" without ever looking at it.

But "Average" — Average Appetite — was here for him to see, a line drawn from side to side on a huge graph. And all over the graph were spots — millions of them. (He was in a place where he could actually see and comprehend "millions".) On that line lived this creation, this demigod, to whom he had felt subservient for so long, whose hungers and whose sense of fitness ought to have been — *had* been — Halvorsen's bench-mark, his reference point. Halvorsen had always felt himself member of a minority — a minority which shrank as he examined it, and he was always examining it. All the world catered to Average Man and his "normal" urges, and this must be proper, for he was aware of the reciprocities: Average Man got these things because these things were what Average Man wanted and needed.

Want and need . . . and there was the extraordinary discovery he had made when Bitty asked him: if people really needed it, would there have to be so much high-pressure salesmanship?

This he threw on the graph like a transparent overlay; it too bore a line from side to side, but much lower down, indicating with much more accuracy just how interested Average Man was in the specific appetite about which he made so much noise. Now bend close and look at those millions of spots — individual people all, each with his true need for the kind of cultural pressure

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which was driving a man, here, to his death from guilt.

The first thing Halvorsen saw was that the dots were scattered so widely that the actual number falling on the line Average Man was negligible: there were countless millions more un-average people. It came to him that those who obey the gospel of Average Man are, in their efforts to be like the mass of humanity, obeying the dictates of one of the smallest minorities of all. The next thing to strike him was that it took the presence of *all* these dots to place that line just where it was; there was no question of better, or worse, or more or less fit. Except for the few down here and their opposite numbers up there, the handful of sick, insane, incomplete or distorted individuals whose sexual appetites were non-existent or extreme, the vast majority above and below the true average were basically "normal." And here where he, Halvorsen might appear on the graph — he had plenty of company.

He'd never known that! The magazine covers, the advertisements, the dirty jokes — they hadn't let him know it.

He understood, now, the mechanism of this cultural preoccupation; it came to him in the recollection that he had appeared at work for three hundred consecutive working days and nobody noticed his ears. And then one day a sebaceous cyst in his left lobe had become infected, and the doctor removed it and he showed up at work with a bandage covering his ear. *Everybody began to think about Halvorsen's ear!* Every interview had to begin with an explanation of his ear or the applicant would keep straying his attention to it. And he'd noticed, too, that after he explained about the cyst, the interviewee would always glance at Halvorsen's other ear before he got back to business. Now, in this silver place where all interrelationships were true ones, he could equate his covered and noticeable ear with a Bikini bathing suit, and see clearly how normal interest-disinterest — acceptance — can be put under forced draft.

It came to him also *why* this particular cultural matrix did this to itself. In its large subconscious, it probably knew quite clearly the true status of its sensual appetites. It must reason, then, that unless it kept these appetites whipped up to a froth at all times, it might not increase itself, and it felt it must increase. This was not a pretty thought, but neither is the pounce of a cat on a baby bird; yet one cannot argue with the drive behind it.

So it was that Halvorsen's reasons for not living ceased to be reasons; with the purest of truth he could say I am not unmanned; I am not unfit; I am not abnormal . . . I am not alone.

All this in no-time, as he closed his eyes to await the mass even now falling on him. And the reflex of reflexes acted just as eyelids met; he

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spun off the bed, bounced out of the nearby window, and was on the grass outside as the ceiling and walls together met the floor in a gout of flame.

XV

The girl climbed up to the front seat of the fire engine. "Move over."

Miss Schmidt swung her worried gaze away from the burning house, and said in a preoccupied tone, "I don't think you'd be allowed to, little girl. We're from that hou — why, it's Mary Haunt!"

"Didn't recognize me, huh?" said Mary Haunt. She swung a hip and shunted Miss Schmidt over. "Can't say I blame you. What a mess!" she said, indicating the house.

"Mr. O'Banion is in there; he went after Mrs. Martin. And have you seen Mr. Halvorsen?"

"No."

"Tonio! Tonio!" Robin suddenly cried.

"Shh, dear. He'll be along."

"Dare he *iss!* Dare he *iss!* Mom*ee!*" he shrieked, "come see my fire engine, shall we?"

"Oh, thank God, thank God they're safe," said Miss Schmidt. She hugged Robin until he grunted.

"I'm all choked up," growled Mary Haunt. Again she made the angry gesture at the house. "*What* a mess. Everything I own — the warpaint, the clothes, all my magazines — everything, gone. You know what that means. I —"

I've got to go home now. And it was here, on the slightest matter of phrasing that the strange flash of silver suffused Mary Haunt; not under the descending scythe of Death, nor under the impact of soul found, heart found: just for the nudge of a word, she had her timeless instant.

All her life and the meaning of her life and all the things in it: the dimity curtains and home-baked bread, Jackie and Seth whamming away at each other for the privilege of carrying her books, the spice-shelf and the daffodils under the parlor windows. She'd loved it so, and reigned over it; and mostly, she'd been a gentle princess and ruled kindly.

Did they throw you out, gal?

She'd never known where it started, how it came about, until now. Now, with astonishment, she did. Daddy started it, before she was old enough to walk; Daddy one of the millions who had applauded a child actress called Shirley Temple, one of the thousands who had idolized her, one of the hundreds who had deified her. "Little Mary Hollywood," he'd called his daughter, and it had been "When you're in pictures, honey —" Every morning was a fountain to empty the reservoir of his dreams; every night he filled again from the depthless well of his ambition for her.

And everyone believed him. Mom came to believe him, and her kid brother, and finally everyone in town. They had to; Daddy's un-

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swerving, undoubting conviction overrode any alternatives, and she herself clinched it, just by being what she was, an exquisite child exquisitely groomed, who grew more beautiful (by Hollywood standards) every year. She wanted what every child wants: loving attention. She got it in fullest measure. She wanted to do what every child wants to do: gain the approval of her elders. She tried; and indeed, no other course was open to her.

Did they throw you out, gal?

Perhaps Daddy might have outgrown it; or if not, perhaps he'd have known, or found out, how to accomplish his dream in a real world. But Daddy died when she was six, and Mom took over his dream as if it had been a flower from his dead hand. She did not nourish it; she pressed it between the leaves of her treasured memories of him. It was a live thing, true, but arrested at the intensity and the formlessness of his hopes for her when she was six. She encouraged the child only to want to be in pictures, and to be sure she would be; it never occurred to her that there might be things for the child to learn. Her career was coming; it was coming like Christmas.

But no one knew when.

And when she cleaned house, they all thought it was sweet; so pretty to watch, but they'd rather take the broom away from her; and when she baked, it was pretty too but not what she was really *for;* and when she read the diet sections in the grocery magazines, that was all right, but the other features — how to make tangerine gravy for duck, how to remove spots from synthetic fibers — "Why, Mary! you'll have a little army worrying about those things for you!"

Movie magazines then, and movies, and waiting, until the day she left.

Did they throw you out, gal?

Screen Society had a feature on Hollywood High School, and it mentioned how many stars and starlets had come from there, and the ages some of them had been when they signed contracts. And suddenly she wasn't the Shirley Temple girl at all, she was older, years older than two girls in the article, the same age as five of them. Yet here she was still, while the whole town waited . . . suppose she never made it? Suppose nothing happened here? And she began to interpret this remark, that look, the other silence, in ways that troubled her, until she wanted to hide, or to drop dead, or leave.

Just like that, leaving was the answer. She told no one, she took what clothes she had that were good, she bought a ticket for just anywhere and wrote thrilling, imaginative, untrue letters at wider and wider intervals. Naïvely she got a job which might mean her Big Break and which actually never would. And at last she reached a point where she would not look back, for wanting home so much; she would not look forward, for

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knowing there was nothing there; she held herself in a present of futility and purposive refusal to further the ambition she insisted she had; and she had no pleasure and no outlet but anger. She took refuge in her furies; she scorned people and what they did and what they wanted, and told them all so. And she took the picture of Mom standing in front of the house in the spring, with the jonquils all about and the tulips coming, and she wrapped it up in the cotton print Mom had made for her fourteenth birthday and never given her because *Screen Society* had said princess-style for teeners was corny.

Did they throw you out, gal?

Old Sam had asked her that; he knew, even when she didn't. But now, in this strange silver moment, she knew; she knew it all. Yes, they had thrown her out. They had let her be a dead man's dream until she was nearly dead herself. They never let her be Mary Haunt who wanted to fix the new curtains and bake a berry pie, and have a square hedge along the Elm Street side and go to meeting on Sundays. They had marked her destiny on her face and body and on the clothes she wore, and stamped it into her speech and fixed her hair the way they wanted it; and to the bottom of her heart she was angry.

And now, all of a sudden, and for the very first time, it occurred to her that she could, if she wanted, be Mary Haunt her own self, and be it right there at home; that home was the best place to be that very good thing, and she could replace their disappointment with a very real pride. She could be home before the Strawberry Festival at the church; she would wear an apron and get suds on her forehead when she pushed her hair back, the way Bitty did sometimes.

So Mary Haunt sat on a fire engine, next to the high-school librarian who was enveloped in a tremendous raincoat, saying that everything was burned up, lost; and about to say, "I've got to go home now." But she said, "I can go home now." She looked into Miss Schmidt's eyes and smiled a smile the older woman had never seen before. "I can, I can! I can go home now!" Mary Haunt sang. Impulsively she took Miss Schmidt's hand and squeezed it. She looked into her face and laughed, "I'm not mad any more, not at you or anybody . . . and I've been a little stinker and I'm sorry; I'm going *home!*" And Miss Schmidt looked at the smudged face, the scorched hair drawn back into a childish pony-tail and held by a rubber band, the spotless princess dress. "Why," said Miss Schmidt, "you're beautiful, just beautiful!" "I'm not. I'm seventeen, only seventeen," Mary Haunt said out of a wild happiness, "and I'm going home and bake a cake." And she hugged her mother's picture and smiled; even the ruined house did not glow quite this way.

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EXCERPT FROM FIELD EXPEDITION [NOTEBOOK]
[! !.!] Did it ever work! [You]'d think these specimens had used Synapse Beta sub Sixteen all their lives! If [we] had a [tenth] as much stamina [we] could [lie down] in a [bed] of paradoxes and go to [sleep].
[We] will observe for a [short period] longer, and then pack up and leave. This is a [fascinating] place to visit, but [I] wouldn't want to [live] here.

XVI

It was October, and possibly the last chance they'd have for a picnic, and the day agreed and was beautiful for them. They found a fine spot where a stand of birch grew on both sides of an old split-rail fence, and a brook went by just out of sight. After they were finished O'Banion lay on his stomach in the sun, and thoughtfully scratched his upper lip with a bit of straw.

His wife laughed softly.

"Hm?"

"You're thinking about the Bittelmans again."

"How'd you know?"

"Just used to it. When you go off into yourself and look astonished and mystified and annoyed all at once, it's the Bittelmans again."

"Harmless hobby," said Halvorsen, and smiled.

"Is it? Tonio, how would you like me to go all pouty and coy and complain that you've spent more time thinking about them than about me?"

"Do by all means go all pouty and coy. I'll divorce you."

"Tony!"

"Well," he said lazily, "I had so much fun marrying you in the first place that it might be worth doing again. Where's Robin?"

"Right h — Oh dear. *Robin!*"

Down in the cleft, where the brook gurgled, Robin's voice answered instantly. "Frogs here, Mommy. Deelicious!"

"Does he eat 'em raw?" asked Halvorsen mildly.

Sue laughed. "That just means 'pretty' or 'desirable' or even 'bright green.' Robin, don't you dare get wet, you promise me?"

"I promise me," said the voice.

"And don't go away!"

"I don't."

"Why don't they show up?" demanded O'Banion. "Just once, that's all I'd ever want. Just show their faces and answer two questions."

"Why don't who — oh, Sam and Bitty. What two questions?"

"What they did to us, how and why."

"That's one question, counsellor?" asked Halvorsen.

"Yes. Two: What they are."

"Now, why'd you say 'what' instead of 'who'?"

"It comes to that." He rolled over and sat up. "Honey, would you mind if I ran down everything we've found out so far, just once more?"

"Summarize and rest your case?"

"I don't know about resting it . . . reviewing the brief."

"I often wonder why you call it a brief," Halvorsen chuckled.

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O'Banion rose and went to the fence. Putting one hand on a slender birch trunk, he hopped upward, turning, to come to rest sitting on the top rail. "Well, one thing I'm sure of: Sam and Bitty could *do* things to people, and they did it to all of us. And I refuse to believe that they did it with logic and persuasion."

"They could be pretty persuasive."

"It was more than that," O'Banion said impatiently. "What they did to me changed everything about me."

"How very intriguing."

"Everything about the way I *think*, hussy. I can look back on that now and realize that I was roped, thrown and notched. When he wanted me to answer questions I had to answer them, no matter what I was thinking. When he was through with me he turned me loose and made me go back to my business as if nothing had happened. Miss Schmidt told me the same thing." He shifted his weight on the rail and said excitedly, "Now there's our prize exhibit. All of us were — changed — by this thing, but Reta — she's a *really* different person."

"She wasn't more changed than the others," said Sue soberly. "She's thirty-eight years old. It's an interesting age because when you're there and look five years older, and then spruce up the way she did and look five years younger, it looks like twenty years' difference, not ten. That's all cosmetics and clothes, though. The real difference is as quiet and deep as —well, Phil here."

Again Halvorsen found a smile. "Perhaps you're right. She shifted from the library to teaching. It was a shift from surrounding herself with other people's knowledge to surrounding other people with hers. She's alive."

"I'll say. Boyfriend too."

"Quiet and deep," said O'Banion thoughtfully, swinging his feet. "That's right. All you get out of Halvorsen when you ask him about it is a smile like a light going on and, 'Now it's right for me to be me.' "

"That's it — all of it," chuckled Halvorsen happily.

"And Mary Haunt, bless her. Second happiest child I ever saw. *Robin! Are you all right?*"

"Yis!" came the voice.

"I'm still not satisfied," said O'Banion. "I have the feeling we're staring at very petty and incidental results of some very important cause. In a moment of acute stress I made a decision which affected my whole life."

"*Our*."

He blew her a kiss. "Reta Schmidt says the same thing, though she wouldn't go into detail. And maybe that's what Halvorsen means when he says, '*Now* it's right for me . . .' *You* annoy me."

"Sir!" she cried with mock horror.

He laughed. "You know what I mean. Only you got exposed to the Bittelmans and didn't change. Every-

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body else got wonderful," he smiled, "You just stayed wonderful. Now what's so special about you?"

"Must I sit here and be —"

"Shush. Think back. Was there any *different* kind of thing that happened to you that night, some kind of emergency thinking you did that was above and beyond anything you thought you could do?"

"Not that I remember."

Suddenly he brought his fist down on his thigh. "There *was!* Remember right after we got out of the house, the wall fell on us? You dragged me back and held me still and that attic vent dropped right around us?"

"That. Yes, I remember. But it wasn't special. It just made sense."

"*Sense?* I'd like to put a computer on that job — after scorching it half through and kicking it around a while. Somehow you calculated how fast that thing was falling and how much ground it would cover when it hit. You computed that against our speed outward. You located the attic vent opening and figured where it would land, and whether or not it could contain us both. Then you estimated our speed *if* we went toward the safe spot and concluded that we could make it. *Then* you went into action, more or less over my dead body to boot. All that in —" He closed his eyes to relive the moment. "— all of one and a half seconds absolute tops. It wasn't *special?*"

"No, it wasn't," she said positively. "It was an emergency, don't you see? A real emergency, not only because we might get hurt, but in terms of all we were to each other and all we could be if only you —"

"Well, I did," he smiled. "But I still don't understand you. You mean you think more, not less — widen your scope instead of narrowing your focus when it's that kind of emergency? You can think of all those things at once, better and faster and more accurately?"

Halvorsen suddenly lunged and caught O'Banion's foot, pulling it sharply upward. He shouted "*Yoop!*" His right hand whipped up and back and scrabbled at the tree-trunk; his torso twisted and his left hand shot straight down. His legs flailed and straightened; for a moment he seesawed on the rail on his kidneys. At last he got his left hand on the rail and pulled himself upward to sit again. "Hey! What do you think you're —"

"Proving a point," said Halvorsen. "Look, Tony: without warning you were thrown off balance. What did you do? You reached out for that tree-trunk without looking — got it, too; you knew just how fast and how far to go. But at the same time you put your left hand straight down, ready to catch your weight if you went down to the ground. Meantime you banged around with your legs and shifted your weight this way just enough to make a new balance on top. Now tell me: did you sit there after I pushed you and fig-

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ure all those things out, one by one?"

"By golly no. Snop — snap — synapses."

"What?"

"Synapses. Sort of pathways in the brain that get paved better and better as you do something over and over. After a while they happen without conscious thought. Keeping your balance is that kind of thing, on the motor level. But don't tell me you have a sort of . . . personal-cultural inner ear — something that makes you react reflectively in terms of your past and your future and . . . but that's what happened to me that night!" He stared at Halvorsen. "You figured that out long ago, you and your IBM head!"

"It always happens if the emergency's a bad one," Sue said composedly. "Sometimes when you don't even know it is an emergency. But what's remarkable? Aren't drowning men supposed to see their whole lives pass before them?"

"Did you say that always happens with your emergencies?"

"Well, doesn't it?"

Suddenly he began to chuckle softly, and at her questioning look he said, "You remind me of something a psychologist told me once. A man was asked to describe his exact sensations on getting drunk. 'Just like anybody else,' he says. 'Well, describe it,' says the doctor. The man says, 'Well, first your face gets a little flushed and your tongue gets thick, and after a while your ears begin to wiggle —' Sue, honey, I've got news for you. Maybe you react like that in important moments, a great big shiny flash of truth and proportional relationships, but believe me, other people don't. I never did until that night. *That's it!*" he yelled at the top of his voice.

From down the slope came a clear little voice, "Wash 'at noice?"

Sue and Halvorsen smiled at one another and then O'Banion said earnestly, "That's what Bitty and Sam gave us — a synaptic reflex like the equilibrium mechanisms, but bigger — much bigger. A human being is an element in a whole culture, and the culture itself is alive . . . I suppose the species could be called, as a whole, a living thing. And when we found ourselves in a stress situation which was going to affect us signally — dangerously, or just importantly — we reacted to it in the way I did just now when you pushed me — only on a cultural level. It's as if Sam and Bitty had found a way to install or develop that 'balancing' mechanism in us. It resolved some deep personal conflict of Halvorsen's; it snapped Mary out of a dangerous delusion and Miss Schmidt out of a dangerous retreat. And, well, you know about me."

"I can't believe people don't think that way in emergencies!" she said, dazed.

"Maybe some do," said Halvorsen. "Come to think of it, people do some remarkable things under sudden stress; they make not-obvious but very right choices under pres-

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sure, like the man who cracks a joke and averts a panic or the boy who throws himself on a grenade to save his squad. They've surveyed themselves in terms of all they are and measured that against their surroundings and all it is — all in a split fraction of a second. I guess everyone has it. Some of it."

"Whatever this synapse is, the Bittelmans gave it to us . . . yes, and maybe set the house on fire too . . . why? Testing? Testing what — just us, or human beings? *What are they?*" demanded the lawyer.

"Gone, that's what," said Halvorsen.

For a very brief time, he was wrong to say that.

EXCERPT FROM FIELD EXPEDITION [NOTEBOOK]
[Our] last [hour] here, so [we] [induced] three of the test specimens to [locus B] for final informal observation. [Smith] pretends to a certain [chagrin]. After all, [he] [says] all [we] did was to come [sizable abstract number] of [terrestrially immeasurable distance unit]s, foregoing absolutely the company of [our] [ ] and the pleasures of the [ ]; strain [our] ingenuity and our [technical equipment] to the [break]ing point, even getting trapped into using that [miserable impractical] power supply and [charge]ing it up every [month]— all to detect and analyze the incidence of Synapse Beta sub Sixteen. And here these specimens sit, locating and defining the Synapse during a brief and idle conversation!
Actually, [I] [think] [Smith] is [pleased] with them for it.
We shall now [dismantle] the [widget] and the [wadget] and [take off].

Robin was watching a trout.

"Tsst! Tsst!"

He was watching more than the trout, really; he was watching its shadow. It had occurred to him that perhaps the shadow wasn't a shadow, but another and fuzzier kind of fish which wouldn't let the more clear-cut one get away from over it, so maybe that was why the trout kept hanging into the current, hanging and *zoom!* darting forward. But he never was fast enough for the fuzzy one, which stayed directly under him no matter what.

"Tsst! Robin!"

He looked up, and the trout was forgotten. He filled his powerful young lungs with air and his face with joy, and then made a heroic effort and stifled his noisy delight in obedience to that familiar finger-on-lips and its explosive "*Shh!*"

Barely able to contain himself, he splashed straight across the brook, shoes and all, and threw himself into Bitty's arms. "Ah Robin!" said the woman, "wicked little boy. Are you a wicked little boy?"

"Yis. Bitty-bitty-BITTY!"

"Shh. Look who's with me." She put him down, and there stood old Sam. "Hey-y-y-y, boy?"

"Ah Sam!" Robin clasped his hands together and got them between his knees, bending almost

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double in delight. "Ware you *been*, Sam?"

"Around," said Sam. "Listen, Robin, we came to say goodby. We're going away now."

"Don't go 'way."

"We have to," said Bitty. She knelt and hugged him. "Goodby, darling."

"Shake," said Sam gravely.

"Shake, rattle an' roll," said Robin with equal sobriety.

"Ready, Sam?"

"All set."

Swiftly they took off their bodies, folded them neatly and put them in two small green plastic cases. On one was lettered [WIDGET] and on the other [WADGET], but of course Robin was too young to read. Besides, he had something else to astonish him. "Boff!" he cried. "Googie!"

Boff and Googie [waved] at him and he waved back. They picked up the plastic cases and threw them into a sort of bubble that was somehow there, and [walked] in after them. Then they [went].

Robin turned away and without once looking back, climbed the slope and ran to Sue. He flung himself into her lap and uttered the long, whistle-like wail that preceded his rare bouts with bitter tears.

"Why *darling*, whatever happened? What *is* it? Did you bump your —"

He raised a flushed and contorted face to her. "Boff gone," he said wetly. "Oh, oh-h-h, Boff an' Googie gone."

He cried most of the way home, and never mentioned Boff again.

INCIDENTAL [NOTES] ON FIELD REPORT: The discovery of total incidence and random use of Synapse Beta sub Sixteen in a species is unique in the known [cosmos]; yet introduction of the mass of data taken on the Field Expedition into the [master] [computer] alters its original [dictum] not at all: the presence of this Synapse in a species ensures its survival.

In the particular case at hand, the species undoubtedly bears, and will always bear, the [curse] of interpersonal and intercultural frictions, due to the amount of paradox possible. Where so many actions, decisions, and organizational activities can occur uncontrolled by the Synapse and its [universal-interrelational] modifying effect, paradox must result. On the other [hand], any species with such a concentration of the Synapse, even in partial use, will not destroy itself and very probably cannot be destroyed by anything.

Prognosis positive.

Their young are delightful. [I] [feel good]. [Smith], [I] [forgive] [you].

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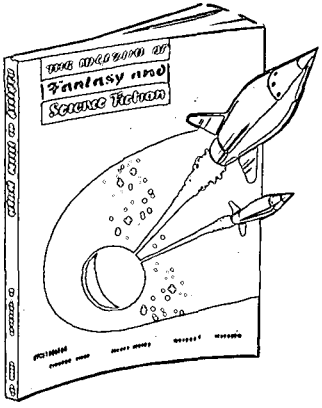

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